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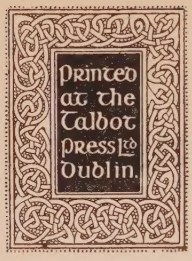

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With the exception of the first and last, these Essays have been reprinted in part from *The North American Review*, *The Forum*, *The Dial*, and *New Ireland*.

"A FENIAN UNIONIST": STANDISH O'GRADY

APPRECIATIONS AND DEPRECIATIONS

"A FENIAN UNIONIST": STANDISH O'GRADY.

THE publication in a uniform edition of Standish O'Grady's epic reconstruction of the Heroic Period in Irish history comes as a final tribute and testimony to his genius. His apparently neglected labours have been rewarded by the flowering of an Anglo-Irish literature, which first caught the breath of national life in the vivid and inspiring pages of O'Grady's bardic histories and romances. Like Finn, he enjoys consideration now that his literary sons and grandsons, nephews and grand-nephews, have grown up around him. But, living in our age, he has had to witness the inevitable ingratitude which the modern parent has been taught to accept from the rising generation. It is not so long ago since Mrs. Katharine Tynan Hinkson, whom he once claimed amongst his disciples, publicly repudiated him. But his right to be regarded as the "father of us all" has been generously acknowledged by every important writer of the Literary Revival, and never more eloquently than in the preface, "Standish O'Grady: a Tribute," which "Æ." has written for the collected edition of O'Grady's works.

Mrs. Hinkson's unfortunate doubt as to whether

many Irish writers would now subscribe to what she calls the "shibboleth" of Standish O'Grady's importance as a literary pioneer, has no more than a purely personal significance. The facts, confirmed by the written word of W. B. Yeats, "Æ.," Lady Gregory, John Todhunter, T. W. Rolleston, and Eleanor Hull—to mention a few typical names—have more weight than this belated scepticism. The author of "The Web of Fräulein," and some fifty volumes of similar prose, need hardly remind us she owes nothing to Standish O'Grady. On the other hand, in the general admiration of his more familiar work in the field of history and legend, there is a tendency to overlook his political writings, which have more than the ephemeral interest of their kind.

In their collected form these writings are as slight as the occasion of their publication was insignificant. That they should appeal to any but their immediate audience is a testimony to the intrinsic quality of the author's work. Only a man of great personality could have survived the almost ignoble circumstances which marked the entry of Standish O'Grady into the arena of politics. At a time when the landowners of Ireland were watching with querulous and impotent dismay the operations of the Irish Land Commission, it was O'Grady who undertook to rally them in defence of the rights which they claimed. On the 22nd December, 1881, he arranged a Landlords' Meeting at the Rotunda where, for the first time, a collective protest was made against the administration of the Irish Land Acts. Once the initiative had been taken, a second and more powerful gathering came together early in 1882, and the same year was pub-

lished *The Crisis in Ireland,* Standish O'Grady's first contribution to our political literature.

This brochure was the utterance of a Saul amongst the prophets of inertia, and its appeal was wasted upon the class of people who had responded to the Rotunda invitation. Those who imagined O'Grady had summoned them to the re-conquest of privileges threatened by the Land League and the Land Acts could derive no satisfaction from his arguments. A strange champion, indeed, this eloquent idealist must have appeared to a typical audience of Irish reactionaries! Scarcely had they recorded their approval of his denunication of Michael Davitt and the English Liberals, when they were surprised by an impassioned address on behalf of the duties and traditions, rather than the privileges, of the Irish aristocracy. "The preservation of Irish landlords as a class, though divested of territorial power," so O'Grady defined his intention, but he spoke to men who, if they could have understood him, would not have found themselves in the plight which had aroused his pity and indignation. In vain, he urged upon them the necessity of regarding the Agrarian Movement in relation to the general stirring of democracy throughout Western Europe, and of formulating a policy based upon the accepted democratic facts of contemporary history. His hearers were as blind to the significance of the history of their own time as they were oblivious of that past history which O'Grady marshalled against their claims for compensation and assistance from England.

Having just then completed his wonderful reconstruction of Ireland's Heroic Age, Standish O'Grady's

imagination was haunted by the splendour of a social order in which aristocracy, resting securely upon an essentially democratic basis, was able to justify itself in the sight of the people. There was something of tragi-comedy in his impulse to arouse in the landed proprietors of the eighties a sense of the high obligations which the tradition of the race imposed upon them. There is no doubt that the author of the Bardic History owed his belief in the destiny of the Irish aristocracy to the contagious grandeur of the narratives of that ancient order which he had evoked with the intuitive sympathy of genius. For O'Grady was by no means the young radical anxious to impress his elders with an intimate knwledge of the progressive thought and revolutionary movement of the hour. His mistrust of democracy was a marked characteristic of even his earliest essays, written pseudonymously in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. He could not but respond to the voice of Walt Whitman, and was one of the select few whom the American poet claimed as his earliest friends on this side of the Atlantic. Yet, in an essay on Whitman, which was published in 1875 over the name of "Arthur Clive," O'Grady naively expresses his aversion to the democratic fervour of *Leaves of Grass*. He is obviously distressed by Whitman's promiscuity of affection, but ingenuously reconciles the dilemma by contrasting the —largely imaginary—superiority of the working classes in America with the offensiveness of their European comrades! We are to understand that, while the proletariat of New Jersey may be a fit subject for poetic contemplation, the same tolerance cannot be extended to democratic society nearer home.

On no account, therefore, could *The Crisis in Ireland* be rejected as an insidious apologia for democracy. Its offence lay in the fact that O'Grady took the Irish aristocracy as seriously as he and they took democracy. Both were filled with profound alarm at the spectacle of a popular movement culminating in expropriation with the sanction of the State. Had the enthusiastic Honorary Secretary of the Landlords' Meeting in the Rotunda contented himself with a denunciation of the Land Leaguers and a discreet eulogy of Landlordism he might have enjoyed such success as may be obtained in the circumstances. But it was adding intellectual insult to pecuniary injury to call upon men to undertake the finest and most arduous tasks of their class just when they had added martyrdom to innumerable other grievances. To connect the land agitation with the larger movement of working-class emancipation was to irritate the ignorance of those whose illusion consisted in regarding Irish unrest as something purely local, largely political and wholly unnatural and unjustifiable. This illusion is perhaps the most valuable fiction in Irish political life. It was more than distressing to find one's champion guilty of heresies not fully comprehended even by one's adversaries.

It did not take very long for the author of *The Crisis in Ireland* to discover that the stream of what is politely termed democratic progress could not be guided by his Rotunda friends. The national characteristic of Irish reaction is its invincible ignorance, which leaves our reactionaries helpless in the face of problems which are solved elsewhere by the benevolent application of enlightened methods. They are

accustomed to rely upon England to save them, and the peculiar condition of our abnormal political and social life usually makes this possible. When O'Grady pointed out that "England, it cannot be too often repeated, like a rotten staff, will break under the weight of the Irish Aristocracy, if, while it totters, it leans once more on that old support," he foretold the fate of all such spent forces, which are enabled by extraneous props to impose a semblance of life upon our credulity. But his aristocrats did not believe him, and their successors preserve a like faith. Even had they understood the message he brought to them they could not bend their atrophied strength to the task of building up a democratic nation. It was a profound irony that the great force of political idealism in Standish O'Grady should have been called forth by so puny an occasion. The chivalry of the gesture inevitably draws attention to the sordid ineffectuality of those for whose benefit it was made.

The Crisis in Ireland might have been forgotten, together with the events which preceded it, were it not that it led to the publication, in 1886, of *Toryism and the Tory Democracy,* O'Grady's most important political work. This volume records the author's disappointment at the failure of his Irish audience to respond to the ideals he had conceived for them, and about half the book is devoted to an address to the Landlords of Ireland, which is a classic of scornful indictment. A dedication to Lord Randolph Churchill, "the first amongst our public men honestly to acknowledge the political and social transformations effected by the rapid advance of Democracy in

the present age," indicates at the outset that Standish O'Grady had no longer any hopes of initiative on the part of the Irish aristocracy. He saw in the formation of the Tory Democratic Party an attempt to save Conservatism from its degeneration into plutocracy—"an uglier form of tyranny, a tyranny worked by the mean rich, by their kept editors and kept politicians." To Lord Randolph Churchill, accordingly, his hopes were transferred, for the English Conservative, at least, was aware of the age in which he lived, whereas his Irish compeers had been guilty of the "great refusal," through sheer inability to grasp the wider issue at stake.

A century of Anglo-Irish politics, beginning with the Union in 1801, is laid bare of its conventional glamour by our Radical Aristocrat, who has set out to demonstrate that "Toryism of the unregenerate, unidea'd type sovereign in these countries" is not only responsible for an ugly chapter of failure in English history, but "moves inevitably in the direction of a corrupt, plutocratic despotism." He summarises the dubious terms of the Act of Union, describes the financial jugglery by which Ireland was burdened beyond her capacity, and correlates these unpleasant facts with the equally unpleasant trend of England's domestic and foreign affairs: the bombardment of Copenhagen, the enclosure of common lands, and the whole train of misery and oppression which accompanied the Napoleonic wars. The bitterest exponent of *Sinn Fein* to-day could not desire to improve upon this summary of the history of the Union, and the critics of "navalism" would be glad to use as propaganda Standish O'Grady's chapter "Our Brothers

—the Danes," in which the contemporary system of maritime warfare is so frankly analysed. But all this serves merely to emphasise the necessity for Conservatism to put its own house in order, and is not intended to give subversive consolation to the disciples of Marx, Henry George and Michael Davitt.

The remedy offered as cure for the malady of Radicalism which threatens the body politic is, in the last analysis, national service. O'Grady clearly saw that the rise of industrialism meant a combination of capital and labour against the landed aristocracy. He also understood that the fundamental factor of the social problem is unemployment. Anticipating Sidney Webb and the Fabians, he proposed the right to work as the device whereby the working classes would be gained for Tory Democracy, and the combination destroyed. It is interesting to recall this section, "Tory Democracy and the State," in connection with the fact that Standish O'Grady's most recent journalistic activity was in the columns of *The New Age*, the organ of the younger group of economic thinkers in London, who have given us the now unhappily familiar word, "profiteering," and are responsible for the doctrine of National Guilds, commonly but erroneously known as "Guild Socialism." *The New Age* has taken the abolition of the wage-system as the only proper and effective means of securing the welfare of the community as a whole, and of the working class in particular.

That O'Grady should be associated, nearly thirty years later, with this journal is peculiarly fitting in view of his arguments in favour of "the national employment of labour" in 1886. His contention, like

that of A. R. Orage and colleagues, was that the exchange of one's labour in return for mere wages, usually at the bare level of subsistence, was not conducive to the best interests of either the nation or its industry. Like them, too, he contrasted the spirit of the army and navy, where men work for pay according to their rank and function, with the condition of those who work for wages determined by the commodity theory of profiteering industry. When O'Grady called upon the Tory Democrats to organise labour he based his conviction upon the fact that the idea of national service, where use is substituted for profit, and pay for wages, would correspond to a sound and fine instinct in humanity. *The New Age* advocates of National Guilds, by which they understand the development of existing Trade Unionism until the whole field of labour is covered, have always insisted upon the importance of State control. The guilds must receive their charter from the State and be subjected to this supreme control. With O'Grady they wish to see industry "organised, disciplined, officered better than the best of our crack regiments, better than our best men-of-war." It is not surprising that the champion of enlightened Conservatism should in the end of his days find himself endorsing the industrial guild policy of *The New Age* and its Irish counterpart, the agricultural guild, as planned by "Æ." in the *Irish Homestead*.

It was inevitable that O'Grady, having made his appeal to Lord Randolph Churchill, should give a final glance at the Irish aristocracy which had failed him. He concludes the book with a long section entitled "Ireland and the Hour," which is divided into

two chapters, one being the famous address to the landlords, the other, an address "To an Individual," lesser known, but interesting in its suggestion as to how an Irish landlord might usefully adapt himself to the changed circumstances of peasant proprietorship—a last manifestation of irrepressible optimism. For who could build upon the wretched material which had just been riddled and rejected as dross in the preceding chapter? Thus, the disillusioned author of *The Crisis in Ireland*:—

"My Lords and Gentlemen,

"I hope by this time that you clearly perceive the very steep nature of the incline along which you and your cause have been for the last six years sliding, and along which to-day you still slide. It is now nigh four years since I took the liberty to point out where tobogganing of this sort, not so pleasant as the Canadian, was sure to terminate, you sitting still in that easy traditional attitude of yours. The termination, as you now see, is a precipice, the edge of the abyss down whose throat you will all disappear, carrying so much else with you, and no one bother himself about you any more. Well, you have sat still—very still. The precious years are gone, but the steep incline is not gone or the law of gravitation, obeying which—for certain laws must be obeyed—you still keep your course downward, velocity increasing, while all the air grows darker, traitorous friends steering aside to the right hand and the left, faces not friendly multiplying, and voices far from kind. You have sat still. But you have done more. In this curious tobogganing, which, too, is a race for your properties, and perhaps for your lives, you have not been quite idle; you have steered—steered straight for the precipice. For

so, and not otherwise, must we regard your Land Corporations, your ceaseless plots and plans to get bought out by English gold, your anile and fatuous vituperation of your enemies, your desertion of the weaker members of your own order, your boyish devotion to boyish amusements, and your transferences of yourselves and your quadrupeds across the Channel to pursue said boyish amusements there with the more comfort. All these ineptitudes, and others not mentioned, seem to your friends so many pats and variations of the steering-paddle by which you keep the nose of your sledge straight as a rifleman's aim for the edge of the abyss. Straight down—is it not so? Velocity increasing—can you doubt it? The faces not friendly and the voices—they multiply, don't they. The air—is it not a little darker than when I last addressed you? The precipice—surely you see it now? Yes, it is quite so; and yet, for all, here you sit tobogganing and steering straight—the sorriest and most ovine set of men that the encircling sun looks down upon to-day. Alas! I believe there never will be, as I know there never has been within the cycle of recorded things, an aristocracy so rotten in its seeming strength, so recreant, resourceless, and stupid in the day of trial, so degenerate, outworn, and effete. You have outlived your day."

To make a summary of this eloquent philippic would be to do an injustice which even the most lengthy quotation can hardly avoid. The address must be read as a whole, so beautifully does oratory combine with historical accuracy to pronounce sentence of death upon the last remnant of a social order. Only in Carlyle does one hear this note of vehement contempt sustained through pages of vivid

evocation. None of the present-day critics of "West Britonism" has so well defined the essential grievance of Irish Ireland whose intolerance is the despair of our peacemakers. "All your follies and sins," writes O'Grady, "you have crowned with an insolence incredible to coming generations." Not only had the aristocracy neglected the duties, and presumed upon the privileges, of their rank, but they had wounded the soul no less than the body of Ireland :—

> "At Ireland and all things Irish you girded till, like the doomed suitors, you are forced to laugh with foreign jaws as this beggar nation, ragged and mendicant, whose substance you devoured and whose house dishonoured, springs like the revealed demi-god of yore upon the threshold and twangs the new-strung bow. It sings, sweetly, does it not? Like the swallow. And yet in this Irish history, whose monuments have rotted under your care or accumulated like a mountain of waste paper, lay for you the key of safety had you but known it, and secrets more precious than equipped armies, or favouring laws, or any Imperial countenance."

There are pages, too, which read as if they had been recently penned by the Editor of *Nationality*, so closely does the friend of aristocracy and enemy of republicanism agree, in fundamentals, with the ideals of the modern separatists as to what might be done if Ireland were mistress of her own resources. Just as Mr. Arthur Griffith bases his calculations upon comparisons of the respective revenues and populations of Ireland and the smaller European nations, so

Standish O'Grady assessed a century's ground rentals as being more than the revenue of Imperial Rome. "World-conquering Rome had to pay her soldiers and sailors, her civil service and judiciary" out of less than was uselessly squandered by the landowning classes in the course of their disintegration. They wasted resources out of which their feudal ancestors maintained the ancient kingdom, and here follows an attractive *Sinn Fein* programme, including an Irish army of 300,000 men, outlined in terms almost identical with those of our latter-day separatist prophets.

Lady Gregory once described Standish O'Grady, in an appropriate paradox, as "a Fenian Unionist," for it his peculiar fortune to have assembled in support of the Imperial relationship precisely those arguments which have increasingly fostered the spirit of independence. It was in 1898, in his third and last political work, *All Ireland,* that this paradoxical expression of Irish nationalism, this Fenian Unionism, became most apparent. Hitherto O'Grady had been too busy, trying to devise the means whereby democracy might be tamed, to scrutinise very closely the precise connotation of his position. But the report of the Financial Relations Commission seemed to offer one more opportunity for the upper classes in Ireland to retrieve their lost leadership. Having himself already exposed certain idiosyncrasies of Irish finance under the Union, he had no difficulty in supporting the findings of that Commission, and he did so with his usual exuberance of faith in the value of allowing literature to aid history in reaching the minds and imaginations of the people. What, for example, could be more striking than that chapter, "The

Veiled Player," in which he recounts a vision of the relations between England and Ireland:—

> "As I thought of these things, and remembered how this was a game, and that we were played against, I saw somewhere, somehow, a vast hall; a silence rested over it like the silence of Eternity. In the midst of the hall was a table and chess-board, where players played. At one side of the table sat a Veiled Figure, with his back to a wall pireced by many doors, all closed, and bolted strongly with brazen bars. On the other side sat a group of men, pale, with bowed heads and knitted brows and strangely glittering eyes, who murmured low together, and took deep counsel before every move. Their leader moved, and the rest consented.
>
> "On the table, on one side lay a paper of printed laws of the game, of perfect caligraphy, emblazoned; and on the other side a pyramid of gold; and yet I was aware as I looked, that the gold was not the true stake—that the Veiled Figure and the men played for their lives, and that it was a duel to the death; and beyond the silence, too, I was aware of the brooding presence of a super-incumbent Destiny, and that all this was his doing, and carefully prepared for from before the foundation of the world, and that I assisted here at the unfolding in Time of the councils of mighty gods, and that it was the ending of great things accomplished, and the beginning of great things to be.
>
> "Move by move I saw the game go against the Veiled Figure, for he was overmatched both in number and power of the pieces and in skill and knowledge of the game.
>
> "After a long pause the Figure shifted its position slightly, and moved.

"'Against the law,' said the men all together. Their leader laid a forefinger on the rule, and looked up. The Figure started to its feet, snatched the paper in its hands and rent it in two. He upset the table, and, with a harsh voice, which rang above the clanging of the gold upon the iron floor, shouted for his 'guards.'

"The doors flew open, for the brazen bars were a fraud—they hung on loose staples—and armed men poured into the hall.

"'Bind me these men,' he cried, 'and thrust them into the deepest and surest of my Imperial dungeons, and gather the gold into my Treasury. Ha!"

"Behind the men, as the vision faded, I thought I heard a noise as of a multitude, a trampling of innumerable feet, and a cry; but whether it was the shouting of a host or the shriek of a fallen people, and whether they ran to succour or whether they fled, I could not tell, for hearing, like sight, failed me as the vision faded."

It was proposed by O'Grady that an All-Ireland Convention should be called for the purpose of demanding a settlement of the financial question, as indicated by the Report of the Commission. "The fiscal spoliation of Ireland by successive Chancellors of the Exchequer, known all along by many of us, and suspected, on general principles, by many more, stands now established beyond the reach of cavil." From this premise he concluded that nothing could be simpler than to unite all parties in a demand for restitution. His experience of the landlords is not forgotten, as he takes care to remind them, but the difficulties were great in that forlorn endeavour to move against the democratic stream. The financial

relations issue is obvious, the facts are admitted and conflict, apparently, with no interest, since all Ireland will benefit by an act of justice. So reasons the Fenian Unionist, who already plans a great future for Ireland within the Empire. Forestalling Bernard Shaw, he argues that the manifest destiny of Irishmen is to rule England, by reason of their superior political wisdom and their dominant influence wherever the English language is spoken, thanks to greater skill of voice and pen.

Here is "constitutional *Sinn Fein*," indeed, in this modest proposal that Ireland shall agree to exercise her legitimate rights! "Within the Constitution an intelligent Irish lad, with an understanding unclouded by political superstition, might manipulate, to the confusion of whole Cabinets of British statesmen, the illimitable power which is ours." Yet, not so innocuous as it may sound, this doctrine of Fenian Unionism, for the conclusion of the book is a reminder that "The Imperial Parliament, in its dealings with Ireland, never yields to Justice but always to Force," and that "Ireland united is Ireland irresistible"—these maxims carefully italicised for the convenience of future reference! But once again Standish O'Grady was to discover that his remedies did not find favour with the patients whom he particularly addressed. When he had found the formula which seemed to account for their failure to react to his stimulants he retired from the practice of his art.

The formula was discovered two years later when he founded and edited *The All Ireland Review*, where under the rubric of "The Great Enchantment," he reflected each week upon past, present and future

questions of Irish policy. The stupefaction of the Ultonians, which he had related in his history of the Red Branch, supplied him with a clue. The malign influences which descended upon the Northern host, and paralysed them when action was needed, became for O'Grady a symbol of the strange paralysis which came upon Ireland at diverse crucial moments in her history. "What I work against—for my fighting days, if I ever had any, are, I think, over—is this 'Great Enchantment,' whose modes of operation are past counting and whose subtlety transcends the human faculties to discern." Then he observes how "our ancestors, from the date of the Battle of the Boyne down to 1882, were under the dominion of an enchantment emanating from something that called itself the King, but which was in fact the genius of mercantile greed." This spell was potent enough to cause the destruction of Ireland's chief industries and her overseas trade. So, on through our history, these influences work for the corruption and disintegration of the nation, until he abandons all hope of active collaboration in politics, referring contemptuously to his last experience, when the All-Ireland Convention was mooted. The "marvellous opportunity" of the Childers' Report was flung aside "for the Fry Commission"!

During the six years which were the life of *The All Ireland Review*, readers of that strange piece of serial autobiography witnessed the gradual retirement of Standish O'Grady from active life. He had edited *The Kilkenny Moderator* and contributed to *The Daily Express* during its brief heyday, but seemingly without effect, and now his own journal began to

have an interest as the focussing point of a literary, not a political, renascence. O'Grady found himself the centre of a group of writers who owed much to his imaginative rather than his political writings, though this differentiation has little justification in his case. He brought the same imaginative power and originality to the contemplation of politics as he had done to history and legend. He may have founded his *Review* with the thought of combating the Great Enchantment, but he soon succumbed to something akin to that, for never was a periodical so irregular, so whimsical and so perfect a reflection of a personality. One delighted in those issues devoted largely to answering the Editor's private correspondence, and one accepted the sudden and ingenuous announcements that his departure for a holiday would suspend the publication for so many weeks. The wayward genius could not accept the delimitations of practical worldly wisdom.

Shortly after the decline of *The All Ireland Review*, O'Grady proclaimed in *The Peasant* his tardy conversion to the modern belief in the masses, not the classes, as the moulders of the future. Communism was obviously the only choice for this still enthusiastic proselyte, who saw in the creation of collectivist colony a chance to reconcile his original faith in aristocracy with the evidences of a democratic age. He called upon the wealthy to provide the land and the money with which to make the experiment, but was not disposed to listen to the friendly counsels of "Æ," proffering a scheme of government. Anarchy seemed but an imaginary danger where all the noblest

human faculties were to be brought into play. Needless to say, salvation was again postponed.

It does not follow, however, that we have glanced at the record of a "splendid failure." The personal influence of Standish O'Grady has been enormous, not only in the more evident department of literature, but also in politics. Party politicians, it is true, take no cognisance of a Fenian Unionist, who became in the end an aristocratic radical, that equally impossible combination in our present view. But no writer could have so frequently anticipated the most recent trend of constructive political thought, or so constantly have transcended the limitations of the essentially narrow field of Irish politics, without arousing a thrill in the young men who were brooding over the fate of our people. It is significant that he should have so persistently stirred the admiration and imagination of "Æ.," whose *National Being* bears many traces of his influence. The idealism of O'Grady finds through "Æ." a practical movement ready to its hand, and the eloquence which seemed wasted is now harnassed to a definite economic propaganda, without, as we know, losing anything of its brilliance. "Æ." has addressed the masters of industry with the same indignant fire as inspired the Address to the Landlords of Ireland. Now, by an interesting revolution of history, the task is to waken in an entirely different class of landowners a sense of duty to themselves and to the State. "Æ." has the advantage of moving towards the past through the future; the co-operative commonwealth is in the direct line of present progress, though its ultimate realisation may mark the return to the conditions of our ancient civilisation, in the eternal

cycle of recurrence. Standish O'Grady would have had us halve the journey by a violent move backwards, but he was driven forward, helpless, by the laws of social gravitation. He came too late into a world too old, but he has not failed to leave his imprint upon the best in contemporary Irish literature and politics. His political, no less than his historical, writings record the strivings of a great soul, through which, as "Æ." has said, "Ireland has found again . . . what seemed lost for ever, the law of its own being, and its memories which go back to the beginning of the world."

"Æ":

MYSTIC AND ECONOMIST.

"Æ.": MYSTIC AND ECONOMIST.

COMPLEXITY has not been, as a rule, characteristic of the writers of the Irish Literary Revival. J. M. Synge was a dramatist, "John Eglinton" is an essayist, W. B. Yeats is a poet, but to none of these, nor to the younger writers, has it been given to unite successfully in one person the activities of a diverse literary personality. That is not to say that the poets have not essayed prose, nor the prose writers verse. Even "John Eglinton," the most faithful to the medium he first cultivated, has given us some poems of a curious and subtle beauty, although he is almost unique in having eschewed the drama. W. B. Yeats is the author of at least one prose volume, *The Celtic Twilight,* which achieves distinction. But in his prose, as in his work for the theatre, Yeats is esentially a poet, and this is the measure of his success and failure in these departments of literature. So too with all the others; they have not attained the same measure of success in the various *genres* to which they have been attracted. Whatever be their dominant quality, this quality inevitably thwarts their efforts outside the medium for which it is specially designed. Synge's poetry in the *Playboy* impresses us by precisely those elements which render his volume of *Poems and Translations* on the whole ineffectual. There, it will be remembered, his best work is seen in the *prose* translation, where Synge's peculiar genius could find

expression, not in his original verses. In short, the personality of these writers is not multiple, and as they can but express themselves, their work is simple rather than complex. In "Æ.," however, Ireland possesses a remarkable exception.

The smallest pseudonym in Irish literature stands for the most manifold, indeed, the greatest personality in Ireland at the present time. "Æ.," mystic poet, painter, and essayist, whose dipthong signature was once the cherished friend of a few, is now known to a wider public as George W. Russell, the co-operative economist. It is difficult to find a recent parallel for such a diversity of intellect and activity, all nevertheless the faithful reflection of a consistent, yet multiform, personality. William Morris suggests an obvious comparison, but there was less contrast between the different interests of Morris than between *Homeward: Songs by the Way* and *The Irish Homestead*, the agricultural journal of which "Æ." is the editor. The combination of artist and poet does not surprise, especially when we find the artist expressing in his painting the same thought and emotion as the poet in his verse. When, however, we hear pleading for agricultural improvements the same voice that was expounding the most abstruse doctrines of Oriental philosophy, or clothing them in verse of the tenderest beauty, then surprise is more legitimate. It is related of a certain society of intellectual pretensions in Dublin that considerable astonishment was experienced when "Æ.," on being invited to speak to the members, discoursed familiarly of fertilisers and creameries, but said not a word of Karma or Nirvana. The "impractical" mystic proved on that occasion

too mundane for the hard-headed intellectuals, who had come prepared for a feast of reason, at which the dreamer's fantasies would be picked to pieces and the dry bones exposed.

It was not, however, always thus. The evolution of George W. Russell, the economist, from "Æ.," the mystic poet, has been gradual. The one has so slowly merged into the other that it is now difficult to dissociate them. In the beginning, "Æ." came forward primarily as an exponent of mysticism, though in such an early pamphlet as *Priest or Hero?* one can discern the later polemicist on behalf of intellectual freedom. With "John Eglinton," Charles Johnston, W. B. Yeats, and Charles Weekes, he was one of a group of young men who met together in Dublin, some twenty to twenty-five years ago, for the discussion and reading of the Vedas and Upanishads. These young enthusiasts created in time a regular centre of intellectual activity, which was translated in part into some of the most interesting literature of the Irish Revival. Their journals, *The Irish Theosophist, The Internationalist,* and *The International Theosophist,* contained a great deal of matter which has since taken a high place in modern Anglo-Irish literature. It was in the pages of those reviews that the first poems of "Æ." were published, and to them we owe a number of essays afterwards collected by "John Eglinton" under the title, *Pebbles From a Brook.* Of all who contributed to that intellectual awakening few remain, in the Hermetic Society, as it is now called. But "Æ." is still the mystic teacher, the ardent seer, whose visions and eloquence continue to influence those about him. One no longer enjoys the spectacle

described by Standish O'Grady, of the youthful "Æ.," his hair flying in the wind, perched on the hillside preaching pantheism to the idle crowd. His friends Johnston and Weekes are elsewhere, the heroic days of intellectual and spiritual revolt have passed; but "Æ." may yet be seen, in less romantic surroundings, constantly preaching the gospel of freedom and idealism.

If we may believe Mr. Moore, who has made himself the rather sophisticated Boswell of "Æ." and his contemporaries, it is to the foresight of his fellow-mystic, Charles Weekes, that we owe the publication of "Æ.'s" first volume. Weekes himself had published in 1893, and immediately withdrawn, a most unusual and promising volume, *Reflections and Refractions*. His lack of faith in his own verse fortunately did not extend to that of his friend, whom he persuaded to preserve what he had written. In the following year, *Homeward: Songs by the Way* appeared. The very title of this exquisite little book indicates the author's attitude toward life. Home, to "Æ.," means the return of the soul to the Oversoul, the absorption of the spirit in the Universal Spirit. *Homeward* is the narrative of his spiritual adventures, the record of those ecstasies which mark the search of the soul for the Infinite. As he says in one of his essays, "the 'quaint rhythmic trick' is a mnemonic by which the poet records, though it be but an errant and faltering tune, the inner music of life." His songs have, therefore, a sensuous, unearthly note; they do not speak of man's experiences in his normal unexalted state, but of those rare moments of divine vision and intuition when his being is dissolved in ecstatic communion

with the Eternal. It is then "Æ." feels that he is one with the invisible, immortal Powers, and obtains that glimpse of Reality which, as Schopenhauer has said, is seen only by the artist in the travail of creation. Shaking himself free of the illusions of this world, where our representations obscure the Real, the seer beholds Deity, and knows himself to be a god. "In the moment he has attained to spiritual vision and ecstasy he has come to his true home, to his true self, to that which shall exist when the light of the sun shall be dark, and the flocks of stars withdrawn from the fields of heaven."

Homeward was followed in 1897 by *The Earth Breath,* and in 1904 by *The Divine Vision.* These latter volumes do not, in a sense, represent any progression; they are the utterances of a similar contemplation, and were, in essentials, contained in his first book. The late Professor Dowden, in one of his rare references to literature which was growing up around him, says, in this connection: "I do not know that we should expect much progress in such art as his. One who has found the secret doesn't need to grow in the common way of growth." There is, of course, the deeper note of a more mature reflection, a certain sadness which has come with the years. The eager spirit still aspires homeward, but the goal is yet far away. In the preface to his *Collected Poems,* published in 1913, "Æ." confesses to the change of mood which makes his later work slightly different from the earlier. "When I first discovered for myself how near was the King in His beauty I thought I would be the singer of the happiest songs. Forgive me, Spirit of my spirit, for this, that I have found it easier to

read the mystery told in tears and understood Thee better in sorrow than in joy, . . though I would not, I have made the way seem thorny and have wandered in too many byways, imagining myself into moods which held Thee not." This volume is, therefore, the complete expression of "Æ.'s" thought, no less than the final collection of his verse. So far as its content is concerned, the book is perfect. Some of the less successful poems of the earlier volumes, notably of *The Earth Breath* and *The Divine Vision*, have been omitted. It is interesting to note that only two from *Homeward* have been suppressed. This is a significant illustration of the initial perfection of his work, and of the constancy of belief it has expressed. Form has never been a preoccupation of "Æ."; his verses are sometimes marred by clumsiness and obscurity of phrase, and he openly avows his inability to remould them before giving them in their now definite arrangement. Nevertheless, *Collected Poems* is an achievement of which Irish literature may be proud. Seldom has such beauty of thought and language been accompanied by the restraint which makes this book the small but great contribution of "Æ." to contemporary poetry.

It is when he is alone with Nature, and beholds the beauties of the phenomenal world, that "Æ." is lifted to participation in the Eternal. The conditions and scenes which produce in him the necessary exalted mood are usually the same. Morning or evening twilight, the quietude of the hills, and the silence of the lonely countryside—these are the typical landscapes of his canvases, as of his poems:

When the breath of twilight blows to flame the misty skies,
All its vaporous sapphire, violet glow and silver gleam
With their magic flood me through the gateway of the eyes;
I am one with twilight's dream.

or:

When twilight flutters the mountains over,
The faery lights from the earth unfold:
And over the caves enchanted hover
The giant heroes and gods of old.

. . . . . .

When twilight over the mountains fluttered,
And night with its starry millions came,
I too had dreams: the songs I have uttered
Come from this heart that was touched by the flame.

These lines chosen from the first two volumes may be paralleled by innumerable passages where the poet evokes the soft dusk, the shadowy twilight hours when he seeks the mountain side for meditation. Numerous, too, are the verses which suggest the coming of daylight, the first glories of sunrise, as the seer salutes the light after a night of rapture on the mountain side:

Still as the holy of holies breathes the vast,
Within its crystal depths the stars grow dim;
Fire on the altar of the hills at last
Burns on the shadowy rim.

Moment that holds all moments; white upon
The verge it trembles; then like mists of flowers
Break from the fairy fountain of the dawn
The hues of many hours.

Yet it is not only in solitude that "Æ." has visions. He is no recluse, dreaming his dreams far away from the disturbing facts of material existence. In one of his most recent poems, *The City*, we find his mood unaltered by the change of setting. Looking "on mortal things with an immortal's eyes," he sees them transfigured:

Above the misty brilliance the streets assume
A night-dilated blue magnificence of gloom
Like many-templed Nineveh tower beyond tower;
And I am hurried on in this immortal hour.
Mine eyes beget new majesties: my spirit greets
The trams, the high-built glittering galleons of the streets
That float through twilight rivers from galaxies of light.

Concerned as most of his poems are with the relation of man to Deity, of the soul to the Eternal, "Æ.'s" verse has been pronounced "inhuman" by some critics. The great themes of poetry, love and death, are not absent from his pages, but they are treated from the special standpoint of the transcendentalist. "Æ." is enamoured of beauty and mystery, he is enthralled by a sense of immortal destinies. In the love of woman he feels an emotion which goes far beyond that conveyed by the mortal senses:

I sometimes think a mighty lover
Takes every burning kiss we give,
His lights are those which round us hover,
For him alone our lives we live.

Often one reads some exquisite evocation of the Irish countryside, only to find, after a verse or two, that

the poet has peopled this landscape with the phantom figures of the heroic age, or with the flaming beings seen in mystic ecstasy. What seemed to be a simple picture becomes a glimpse behind the veil, and bog and mountain are forgotten in the splendour of the vision. Similarly in his love poems "Æ." has the faculty of projecting his emotion into regions beyond time and space:

You look at me with wan, bright eyes,
When in the deeper world I stray:
You fear some hidden ambush lies
In wait to call me, "Come away."

What if I see beyond the veil
Your starry self beseeching me,
Or at its stern command grow pale,
"Let her be free, let her be free."

Death, for him, has none of the mysterious terror which has inspired so much fine poetry. To "Æ." the immortality of man is assured, for is he not of the same divine substance as the Great Source of all being? Death is the consummation of the greatest desire, permanent absorption into the Universal Spirit. He sees it as the homecoming of the soul, and it is with a sense of infinite peace and joy that he anticipates the passage "beyond the Gateways of the Day," when he will rest "in the high Ancestral Self."

Unto the deep the deep heart goes,
It lays its sadness nigh the breast:
Only the Mighty Mother knows
The wounds that quiver unconfessed.

Where the last anguish deepens—there
The fire of beauty smites through pain:
A glory moves amid despair,
The Mother takes her child again.

The *leitmotiv* of "Æ.'s" poetry, and the fundamental postulate of his philosophy, is the divine origin of man, the gradual falling away of the human race from its heroic destinies, and its present enslavement to materialism. It is only when he is aroused by some noble ideal, or some great memory, that man rises to a realisation of the divinity that is in him. His constant endeavour is to fan this divine spark into flame. Hence his love and admiration for the heroic figures of Celtic history and legend, when man carried latent within him all the potentialities of nature, and his faculties were not diminished by specialisation.

Something beyond yon coward gaze
Betrays the royal line;
Its lust and hate, but errant rays,
Are at their root divine.

I hail the light of elder years
Behind the niggard mould,
The fiery kings, the seraph seers,
As in the age of gold.

It is interesting to notice that this trait is common to the three most dissimilar, but also most distinctive, writers of the Irish Literary Revival. It first awakened Standish O'Grady's interest in Ireland's past, and

gave us those eloquent histories which are rightly regarded as the source of the Revival. Simultaneously it found expression in "Æ.'s" verse, and in the prose of "John Eglinton's" *Two Essays on the Remnant* and *Pebbles from a Brook*. The influence of O'Grady on the poet was marked. There can be little doubt it was because of his illustration from Irish history of the ideals which "Æ." himself had formed, that he attracted the younger writer. He recalls the heroes of the Red Branch, the giants of olden story, and compares with those spacious days our present decadence, the "Iron Age" as he calls it.

How came this pigmy rabble spun,
After the gods and kings of old,
Upon a tapestry begun
With threads of silver and of gold?
. . . . . .
The morning stars were heard to sing
When man towered godlike in his prime.
One equal memory let us bring
Before we face our night in time
Grant us one only Evening Star,
The Iron Age's Avatar.

The impatience of all the meanness and squalor of modern social conditions which inspires this fine poem, though a permanent element in the poet's criticism of life, does not often find such wrathful vehemence of expression. Such poems as *The Earth* and *The Twilight of the Earth* are more typical of "Æ.'s" protest and longing. The verses cited have been chosen because they are of comparatively recent date, and represent the force of indignation, in one

whose nature is of a unique gentleness. It would, however, be incorrect to regard these words as a confession of despair. Has he not said in *The Twilight of the Earth:*

The Power is ours to make or mar
Our fate as on the earliest morn,
The Darkness and the Radiance are
Creatures within the spirit born.

II.

It was long a regret with lovers of Irish literature that the prose writings of "Æ." had never been collected into a representative volume. Until the publication of *Imaginations and Reveries* in 1915 they were practically inaccessible, either because of their dispersion in the various journals in which they originally appeared, or because of their partial republication in limited or semi-private editions, now for the most part out of print. He has written few things more beautiful than that little volume of mystic stories, *The Mask of Apollo,* published in 1904, but already very rare. Although the date of publication is comparatively recent, the book belongs to a much earlier period, some of the stories having appeared in those esoteric reviews, *The Shrine* and *The Green Sheaf.* "Æ.'s" prose was just ripening into the strength and delicacy which characterise his later essays. *The Mask of Apollo* has a fresh charm, a sincerity and tenderness which cannot fail to delight. The stories range from the Orientalism of *The Cave of Lillith* and *The Meditation of Ananda* to the Celticism of *A Dream of Angus Oge,* in which the East and the West are blended in a manner which "Æ." has

made his own. "John Eglinton" calls him somewhere "the theologian of Neo-Celticism," and certain it is that he has interpreted the mythology and legends of Ireland in terms of Oriental mysticism. The mysticism of "Æ." is a profound religious belief, having its roots in the very depths of his nature. To this conviction everything in his life is referred and adjusted, and his prose work, outside of economic propaganda, is devoted to the enunciation of his doctrines. Sometimes, as in the volume just mentioned, he adopts the form of simple narratives, at other times, that of the essay. The most notable of the latter are *The Hero in Man* and *The Renewal of Youth,* which have been made available in pamphlet form.

Some Irish Essays, which appeared in 1906, contains a selection of "Æ.'s" literary essays. With Douglas Hyde, W. B. Yeats, Standish O'Grady, "John Eglinton" and others, he was a collaborator in two previous collections of essays, *Literary Ideals in Ireland* and *Ideals in Ireland,* but this brochure—for it is little more—is the only book of its kind which bears his name. It opens with *Nationality and Cosmopolitanism in Art,* one of the best manifestoes on behalf of the Literary Revival that has yet been written. "Æ." rightly conceives it the aim and *raison d'être* of the new Anglo-Irish literature "to create a national ideal in Ireland, or rather to let that spirit incarnate fully which began among the ancient peoples, which has haunted the hearts, and whispered a dim revelation of itself, through the lips of the bards and peasant storytellers." In *The Dramatic Treatment of Heroic Literature* are set forth the

reasons which call for the re-creation of the bardic tales at the hands of the modern poets, and more particularly the use of this material in the Irish Theatre. "Æ." was afterwards to put his theories into practice by writing *Deirdre*, the first important play to be performed by the company from which sprang the Irish National Theatre, as distinct from the Irish Literary Theatre, founded by Edward Martyn, George Moore, and W. B. Yeats. The author has since recanted some of the views he first held as to the desirability of staging the heroic stories, perhaps as a result of his dissatisfaction with his own effort in that direction. There can, however, be no question as to the suitability of such a natural tragedy as that of *Deirdre* for the stage. Synge's version, incomplete as it is, shows sufficiently the power of this theme, when treated by a real dramatist. Of "Æ.'s" *Deirdre*, as of that of Yeats, it may be said that it is a work of poetic rather than dramatic merit.

Within recent years "Æ." has made his prose almost exclusively a vehicle for the propagation of his social and economic ideas. A born teacher of men, it was a characteristic impulse that led him to flee from the possible sterility of a purely meditative, literary activity, and to throw himself into the work of agricultural reorganisation. George Moore has regretted that the poet should thus risk losing himself in the humdrum detail of co-operative propaganda. He admits, nevertheless, that "the 'Æ.' of our deepest affection is not dead, but sleeping . . . loose him among the mountains, and in a few weeks he will be hearing the fairy bells again." In that rather hyperbolic, sentimental manner which, as he com-

plains, creeps inevitably into his portraiture of "Æ.," in *Hail and Farewell*, Moore has expressed the facts. The author of *Homeward* is always discernible in the editor of *The Irish Homestead*. His contact with the routine of journalism and the essentially practical work of reorganisation, has by no means blunted his mystic sense. In fact he has gained enormously by this diversity of occupation, which has saved him from exhausting his artistic faculty by writing in order to live, while poetry and painting prevent him from forgetting the æsthetic in the economic man. His spiritual sense has been all the more sharpened by the correlation of the superhuman with the all-too-human.

The Irish co-operative movement has gained infinitely by the presence of "Æ.," who has brought into it that loftiness of ideal, that faith in mankind, which are the mark of his poetry. He has raised the economic struggle to a level from which one catches a glimpse of vistas elsewhere obscured by the darkness of materialism. Co-operation is seen to be something more than the saving of middlemen's profits and the capture of dividends; it stands for a new social order. This is not to say that "Æ." is an impractical idealist, ignoring the obvious facts of the movement in which he is engaged. Week by week, in *The Irish Homestead*, he demonstrates his ability to grapple with the difficulties that arise. His experience as a lecturer and organiser provided him with all the first-hand knowledge of the specific questions with which he has to deal. To the experience thus acquired he was able to add a deep acquaintance with the rural population of Ireland, from which he sprang.

Whether, therefore, he is pleading for the establishment of credit banks and creameries, or combating the criticism of opponents, the forces of theory and practice, of experience and idealism, combine to give Irish co-operators a powerful champion.

Fortunately, unlike so much of his other prose work, what "Æ." has written on behalf of the co-operative ideal is not lost in the stagnant waters of old journalism. The quintessence of his social teaching has been preserved in *Co-operation and Nationality,* affectionately termed the Bible of the Irish co-operator. This volume, which has been widely recognised abroad, and has even been translated into Finnish, is one of the noblest expositions of national polity Ireland has seen. As far removed as its author from the worn-out politics of the traditional parties, it represents the stirring of a new spirit in a country harassed by political dogmatists, who stifle all thought outside certain prescribed limits. In the years to come it will doubtless play a larger part, when the younger generation to whose aspirations it more nearly corresponds takes the place of those whose lives and brains have been narrowed by concentration upon the single question of Home Rule. For the moment the book stands for a minority, who are regarded with equal suspicion by the two groups, into neither of which they seem to fit.

Political unorthodoxy is still the unpardonable offence in Ireland. The man who ventures to tread the narrow path between the Orange and the Green soon finds a strange unanimity in those otherwise hostile ranks, which close in to crush him. Thanks to the leadership of "Æ." there is now a sufficient

wedge of heretics to keep an open space where modern ideas may be discussed, and the Battle of the Boyne no longer serves as a test of citizenship.

Co-operation and Nationality is an appeal for the building up of a rural civilisation, a co-operative commonwealth. Ireland being an agricultural rather than an industrial country, its progress depends upon the reorganisation of rural conditions. "We have not had a social order in Ireland since the time of the clans," the author writes, and it is his purpose to set his countrymen thinking in the direction that will lead to the restoration of something approaching the ancient order. With his belief in the divine potentialities of man, "Æ." is naturally an opponent of State Socialism. "The grim mechanic state" must not be allowed to usurp the initiative of the individual, for it is in the individual that he places all his hopes. From the voluntary activities and association of the various sections of the community, the new social organism will be created.

The individual protest of a nature such as "Æ.'s" might perhaps have had less weight were not the special local conditions all in favour of his personal feeling. The possession of the soil of Ireland by numerous small proprietors has given an official seal to the sentimental consecration of the right of private ownership. The Land Acts have blocked the way to the progress of nationalisation and state ownership. In Ireland, therefore, success depends upon the power to effect a social reconstruction outside the limits of collectivist sociology.

In England at the present time the more alert economists are warning the people of the dangers in

ineffectiveness of collectivism, and National Guilds are engaging attention as offering an escape from the impending horrors of the servile State. This proposal to revive the ancient guilds, to organise the community according to crafts, is significant. It indicates the quickening of the same spirit, applied to industrial conditions, as has been at work in Ireland upon the agricultural problem. It would be absurd to labour too closely the analogy between the guilds of England, advocated by *The New Age*, and the co-operative groups which "Æ." has striven to establish in Ireland. In principle, however, they are similar, particularly in so far as they represent a revolt against the slavery which seems inseparable from State Socialism.

"Æ." would have us revert as closely as possible to the clan system, of which he has said: "We had true rural communities in ancient Ireland, though the organisation was military rather than economic." How to approximate to that ancient order, this time with an economic basis, is the problem he has set himself to solve. First of all the eyes of the people must be turned from the State Departments, from whence, as they imagine, cometh their help. They must look to themselves, and develop the faculty of mutual aid. Already a great step has been made by the implanting among the farmers of the co-operative ideal. Every creamery that is set up, every credit bank that is established, is evidence of the awakening of the communal sense. The Irish farmers are realising the identity of their interests with those of their political opponents, and the need and advantage of working together. A similar change is affecting

the towns, and "Æ." has the satisfaction of knowing that a strong, practical movement is ploughing deeply the soil into which he would drop the seeds of his idealism. The spread of co-operation is the first step in the direction of that commonwealth which is ever before his eyes, and which he has described with all the charm of a noble enthusiasm. The co-operative societies contain the nucleus of a true social organism, where each member feels himself identified with the common welfare. Into such genuine communities "Æ." would see Ireland resolved, on the model of the Greek states. No state should become so large as to be inhuman, as to render impossible that contact and sympathy with all that concerns the public interest, without which the sense of citizenship is imperfect or atrophied. But this will take time. The movement must get rid of those who think that, "because they have made good butter, they have crowned their parochial generation with a halo of glory." They must entertain a larger hope than that of "petty parsimonies and petty gains," as the author of *Co-operation and Nationality* expresses it. Let them reflect where "all this long cavalcade of the Gael is tending, and how and in what manner their tents will be pitched in the evening of their generation." For, as "Æ." so finely asserts:

> "A national purpose is the most unconquerable and victorious of all things on earth. It can raise up Babylons from the sands of the desert, and make imperial civilisations spring from out a score of huts, and, after it has wrought its will, it can leave monuments that seem as everlasting a portion of nature as the rocks."

Subsequently "Æ." expanded and transfigured that early booklet, and *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity* was published in 1916 as the new evangel of Irish politics. A political document so contrary to the accepted dogmas of party has never before obtained such universal praise as this beautiful and eloquent meditation on "the State of Ireland, its character and future." Enough has already been written in exposition of "Æ.'s" social philosophy to make a more than brief reference to *The National Being* unnecessary. That Irishmen are democratic in their economics and aristocratic in their thinking is the assumption from which he argues that a co-operative commonwealth can alone correspond to the best needs and impulses of the Irish nation. The obscure millions must be drawn "into the light," and made "real partners in the social order," if we are to leave behind us "a beauty which we could imagine after-generations brooding over with uplifted heart." Belated individualism and *laisser faire* have been vigorously disturbed in the rural world by the discovery that more can be achieved by mutual aid than by mutual competition, and "Æ." believes that the entire industrial organism will be strengthened and purified by the application of the same principle. Agricultural co-operation, and national guilds for the industrial centres, are his remedy and his ideal. "Men no more will be content under rulers of industry they do not elect themselves, than they were under political rulers claiming obedience in the name of God."

A practical idealist, associated with a movement whose tangible results can neither be denied nor ob-

scured, "Æ." has preserved intact his faith and his imagination, an astonishing achievement. In this book his "imaginative meditation" progresses on winged flight, heedless of the obstacles which crowd along the path of national endeavour. Optimistic prophecy, based upon a brilliantly searching and damaging criticism of actual conditions, intellectual, economic and political—what could be more irresistible and more stimulating? If "Æ." has hitched his waggon to a star, it is a real waggon, nevertheless, an agricultural implement, so to speak, which everyone of us has seen, laden, perhaps, with the fruits of co-operation. No Irishman with a soul above party politics can read unmoved this impassioned plea for the national being, of which each muscle and fibre must be drawn from ourselves, if it is to grow and prosper as an organic whole. It is only right that such a work should find a great response in every section of Irish life, permanently elevating the author to the level of statesmanship. This was evidenced in the recent consultation of "Æ." by those who believed that he could bring a genuine and disinterested love of country to the solution of the tortured and tortuous question of self-government for Ireland.

Thoughts for a Convention: Memorandum on the State of Ireland will have an interest apart from the immediate occasion for which the pamphlet was written. It was "Æ.'s" first descent into the dusty *mêlée* of contemporary Anglo-Irish politics, yet one notes a paradoxical similarity of tone and purpose recalling the now famous *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* of Romain Rallond. The author of *Above the Battle,*

to quote the unhappily translated title, has earned admiration from all but his own countrymen, who have denounced him with an abusive violence which seems excessive even to ears distracted by three years' of warfare. Similiarly, a great number of patriotic Irishmen could not respond to the benevolent neutrality of "Æ.'s" exposition of the condition of the three parties in Ireland. Whatever else we may have learned, and forgotten, since the convulsion of Europe in 1914, our attention has been forcibly drawn to the risks of neutrality. The few genuine neutrals who have been articulate have earned the hatred and contempt of belligerents convinced that an impartial judgment is necessarily a reflection upon the cause they hold sacred. In his endeavour to extract the venom from the fangs of faction "Æ." had to incur the suspicion of compromising with the enemy. But his voice was not raised in vain above the battle of *intransigeant* parties.

It is almost as hopeless to try to sum up the teaching of "Æ." as to attempt an adequate description of the author. In the man himself, as in his work, one is constantly obtaining glimpses of an extraordinarily beautiful soul. There is nothing he has touched without investing it with the glamour of idealism. His conversation is at its best a great, rhythmic torrent, which carries away the hearer, who in most cases is reduced to rapt attention. With a wealth of imagery, with subtlety of mind, with astonishing breadth of knowledge, "Æ." will speak of every question that presents itself to the intelligent man of to-day—or of all time, should the theme be metaphysical. The conversation ranges over a compre-

hensive expanse of human experience; the Sanscrit Books are invoked at one moment, only to make way the next for a citation from the latest work on agricultural credit, or a scathing scientifico-metaphysical indictment of the pretensions of the biologists. All his discourse is fired by the same splendid energy, the same enthusiasm for what is noble and exalting in mankind. Few young men can have known "Æ." without being stirred mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, and as long as the younger generation comes under his influence there is hope for the destinies of new Ireland.

"Æ.'s" prodigality of ideas and infinite kindness make him the obvious refuge for those in intelllectual distress, as George Moore has testified in *Vale*. Could one ascertain precisely how much of the best work of the Literary Revival is due to "Æ.," some interesting facts would be revealed. Yet he has had to suffer the sneers and contumely of the children of fear and conventionality. At first it was his spiritual unorthodoxy that disturbed, now attention is directed to his heretical politics, for he refuses to accept current political labels. As he rightly says, the movement he stands for is one which must go on "whether we are ruled from Westminster or College Green." He has fought all his life, in other words, for social and intellectual progress, things rather undervalued in the days of strenuous "patriotism." Now, however, Ireland is beginning to have need of constructive deeds rather than words. She is entering upon an era of affirmation after more than a century of negation. Already "Æ." has been able to

speak proudly "*On behalf of Some Irishmen not Followers of Tradition*":

They call us aliens, we are told,
Because our wayward visions stray
From that dim banner they unfold
The dreams of worn out yesterday.
The sun of all the past is theirs,
The creeds, the deeds, the fame, the name,
Whose death-created glory flares
And dims the spark of living flame.
They weave the necromancer's spell,
And burst the graves where martyrs slept
Their ancient story to retell
Renewing tears the dead have wept.

He concludes this poem by lines which admirably sum up the teaching and ideals of "Æ.":

We are less children of this clime
Than of some nation yet unborn
Or Empire in the womb of Time. . . . .
We hold the Ireland in the heart
More than the land our eyes have seen,
And love the goal for which we start
More than the tale of what has been.

We would no Irish sign efface,
But yet our lips would gladlier hail
The firstborn of the coming Race
Than the last splendour of the Gael.
No blazoned banner we unfold—
One charge alone we give to youth
Against the sceptred myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth.

AN IRISH ESSAYIST:

"JOHN EGLINTON."

AN IRISH ESSAYIST: "JOHN EGLINTON."

"JOHN Eglinton" is probably the least known of the group of writers associated with the Irish Literary Revival. Younger men, in reality his successors, have achieved a certain degree of fame or popularity, while he remains a figure apart, known only to the few who appreciate the charm of his beautiful prose. He is "a sort of lonely thorn-tree," as George Moore described him in *Ave,* but "the thorn breaks into flower" and then we get, sometimes the luxuriance of *Two Essays on the Remnant,* sometimes the less riotous bloom of *Pebbles from a Brook.* These two volumes, together with *Bards and Saints,* constituted for many years "John Eglinton's" slender contribution to permanent literature. For the rest, his work is scattered throughout the pages of various reviews and esoteric magazines, whence it is only now being rescued, although vain attempts had heretofore been made to persuade the author to do this. In the last two volumes, as also in *Literary Ideals in Ireland,* some of these essays have been saved from the dusty oblivion of the files of periodical literature, those mines of hidden wealth, the joy of the literary explorer and the despair of librarians. It is not surprising, therefore, that he has escaped the attention of the majority of critics, who have identified Anglo-Irish literature with the work of its poets and dramatists. Although he has written some verse, he has never come forward as a dramatist, and his claim to consideration must be based solely upon his distinc-

tion as an essayist. His new volume, *Anglo-Irish Essays*, should do much to reinforce this claim.

It is not only in his failure to attain popularity that "John Eglinton" is an isolated figure in contemporary literature. A certain ironical detachment and scepticism indicate a mentality not usually associated with the writers of the Irish literary movement. The illusory, shadowy world to which Mr. Yeats has accustomed his readers, and the flamboyant rhetorical energy of Synge's peasantry find no counterpart in the writings of "John Eglinton." Those who have identified the two phases of the Irish mind with the "Celtic Twilight" of the Yeats school, and the verbal magnificence of Synge's drama, will find in him a very different aspect of the Irish mind. As is popularly supposed, "John Eglinton" is a mystic, but the term has only been applied to him in public as one of abuse, by unfriendly critics, of whom he has many. His myticism does not express itself in terms of pantheistic rapture as in the works of "Æ.," whose name is most intimately associated with the cult of the inner life in Ireland. Like the poet, he has felt the touch of the "earth-breath" upon him, but the voice of Nature called to him rather as to Wordsworth, inviting him to flee from "the dull banausic murmur" of city life. In the green trees and the open country, he sees, as it were, a protest against ugliness of civilisation which has forced us to "coagulate into cities." He rejoices to see our cities submit to "the green invasion of the passive trees" representing the return of all that we have suppressed from our lives. He does not seek solitude like "Æ.," that he may be in communion with

the Divine Spirit of the Universe, but rather as a step in the direction of the mystical wilderness whither he has called upon the idealists to follow him. That, indeed, was the message by which he first revealed himself some twenty years ago in *Two Essays on the Remnant*.

It is hardly possible to analyse this wonderful little book with its enigmatic title suggestive of Hebrew prophecy. It is an appeal to what Isaiah called "the remnant that are left," the band of artists and thinkers who have not been assimilated by modern civilisation. They must, as the Chosen People, betake themselves once again to the wilderness and withdraw from a life in which they can take no part, and which is in fact hostile to them. In the presence within the state of the unemployed idealist "John Eglinton" sees the cause of all social upheavals and discontents. "Once a man is glamoured with the thought of the wilderness he becomes indifferent." "He is no longer a good citizen, and he infects with his indifference those who should be so." If the Chosen People had only retired from a system of things in which they have no concern "there would have been no oppression in store for them and no uneasy dreams for the Pharaoh of civilisation. The French Revolution was only the first of the great plagues." Civilisation seems to have no work for the "lapsed masses" of idealism. "We declare," he cries, "that civilisation is advancing, in so far as it is doing so, with a velocity acquired before it had begun to discard the services of such persons as ourselves," and he warns us of the danger to the community of these supernumerary citiens. Some of

them can subsist for a time "on the fag ends of wages and patrimonies" and have much time for "sharpening their wits in reflection and reading," and they are not all so harmless as the essayist, who, if "armed not with bombs but with generalisations," explains that it is only because he can handle these "with less risk to himself because he has more confidence in them."

Few of the generalisations are sounder than that upon which he bases his criticism of modern social conditions. "The test of the state of civilisation is therefore quite simple—whether in assisting it the individual is astride of his proper instincts." But "John Eglinton" holds that, instead of being superior to each of its units the state is "centuries behindhand." Nowadays development is individual, hence the formation of a remnant which must go apart and dwell in the wilderness and "live the great life beneath the sun and moon." Removed from progress, to which they no longer contribute, leaving their ideas to fructify in the soil they have fertilised, the idealists will derive a new inspiration and prepare themselves for future sowings. If they remain they are obliged to profane their minds and to submit to slavery, which the author admirably defines as the condition in which "the mind consents to labour for the body." As the Chosen People of old made bricks, so the bondage of their successors is book-making, a task for which they are peculiarly fitted. "The pen indeed seems to grow to the hand of an idealist, to carry his slender finger like an Arab horseman over the silent plains of foolscap." In their capacity as "thought-artisans" employment

has been found for the remnant, though they remain, as they started, "a class subservient to alien interests." Their function is reduced to "ministering intellectual interests in all kinds of ingenious ways to an unbelieving public," they have been betrayed by their very "dexterity" in the manipulation of ideas.

In Goethe, "John Eglinton" sees the Joseph who has, by reason of his prosperity, become the cause of the captivity of his brethren. It was Goethe who discovered "the vast capacities of art as an absorbent medium," when the atmosphere of Europe was "unduly charged with ideas and threatened to enter the life of each man with disastrous consequences to society." Nevertheless, he recognises Goethe as one of the glories of idealism, whatever disservice his prosperity may have rendered those who followed him. He describes a pilgrimage to the little room at Weimar whither came "the restless and swarming ideas which had lately seemed to cloud all the plains of Europe under their wings, and minister ecliptic darkness to the performance of evil deeds." With Schiller as *Zauberlehrling,* Weimar became the "chief emporium of ideas in Europe," in which Goethe carried on a brisk business, discharging his surplus "in the form of epigrams" on those less fortunate. This procedure is likened by the essayist to that of young men who "fling hot pennies to the rabble." On the death of Goethe it seemed as if the idealists were to come into their own and that "the consummation of the promised land would not exclude the flesh-pots of Egypt." Soon, however, civilisation turned its attention to its own concerns, leaving the idealists

" where the flood tide had raised them." The choice before the idealist is therefore to perpetuate the onward impulse in his life, or to resign himself to " ministering with an ever-dwindling imaginative reason to the requirements of civilisation." Such is the fate in store for the remnant; for they have no Moses to lead them forth into the wilderness. They have not harkened to the voices—Rousseau, Whitman, Tolstoy —calling upon them to abandon " the doomed hulk of modern civilisation."

> " Civilisation has been too much for them—circumstances over which they had no control. The gods, at least, have not loved them. And at length, some dry-eyed poet, glancing sidelong and half in fear at the watching heavens, once so blue and fortunate to his early vision, pens a last blasphemy of them, and leaving his tablets behind him and covering his eyes, hurries down into the way of death."

There is a beautiful description of Wordsworth, " the tall North-country youth " walking up and down in London, trying " to catch on as a citizen." Wordsworth, whom he regards as the " first and greatest of the unemployed," is " John Eglinton's " constant companion. His name which was " a far-fluttering unattainable carol " to the author in the beginning has since seldom been absent from his thoughts. He pictures the poet as he walks in Cheapside and hears the song of a thrush. It is the time of the " ruddy sunsets of the French Revolution " when men were suspicious of foreigners, yet they do not see in Wordsworth what this young idealist had perceived, when he cried :

" Seize him, ye Londoners ! It is a treachery !

> He is no Gallic emissary, but worse! He is in league with the green hosts of trees, whose barbaric siege ye have put back so long from year to year, and of the countless horde of grass that springs in the breaches of ruins and in the interstices of depopulate pavements!"

Like Socrates, Wordsworth may be accused of corrupting the youths by "indisposing them for civic action." The temptation to quote is great, but this final picture of the Chosen People at work must suffice:

> "Civilised man is once more a savage, but he is not as if civilisation had never been. He is no longer what he was when the failure within him of his ruder instincts left him social and stationary. He has now left his barbaric ennui behind him, and with a full heart turns once more to nature, his home and his mother. . . . He is as one who goes forth into the morning woods, in whose brain yet flaunt the pomps and processions of his dreams."

"John Eglinton" has been described by some as "an Irish Emerson," and in *Pebbles from a Brook* he has substantiated this claim on his behalf. Such subjects as "Knowledge," "Apostolic Succession," or "The Three Qualities in Poetry" immediately suggest the great American essayist. Like Emerson, whom he has evidently thoroughly absorbed, the Irish essayist is a transcendentalist. "It is religion," he writes, "which has made the daring attempt to give a meaning to life," but we have broken with past beliefs, without having found a substitute. We have pinned our faith to science, but scientists admit "that something is wanting in the Universe to answer to the moral element in experience." So long as we direct

our lives from without inward, rather than from within outward, he sees little hope of our supplying this deficiency. Mankind has become enamoured of the mere acquisition of knowledge, "big brains have been in requisition rather than great natures," but in the plethora of facts the meaning of life has become obscured. "The age of omniscience is the age of agnosticism." We must turn to ourselves, to our own experiences, which embody facts outside the range of scientific speculation. "We ourselves are the centre from which radiate all the paths of speculation," let us therefore be less concerned with the discoveries of science. "It is the function of philosophy to launch a generalisation into human consciousness," there the cold truths of the laboratory may become forces, provided they enlist human sympathy. What we need is that transcendental certainty which resides in the inmost being of man, and which the poet and thinker alone can give us. "The serried ranks of science and common sense" have failed in this task, for they have sought without what is only forthcomng from within. Science, however, is suspicious of visionaries "as being thaumaturgist in tendency" and he must be "a clever thaumaturgus who will do anything with the eyes of the evolutionary philosophers upon him." Evolution does not take account of the exceptional, but of the normal. "It knows only of householders and shareholders who ride the central flood of evolutionary tendency, blown along by the soft gales of natural selection." Sometimes, however, nature sends men into the world to test the value of society, not in the light of acquired knowledge, but by the touchstone of feeling and in-

tuition. The voices of our poets and idealists recall us to a sense of our own worth, "we realise that man himself is the test of all things and are conscious of the reality of the inward life." But we are inclined to view art and religion as objective value without any relation to what is essential in us. Hence the effort of literature to become divorced from life and to aspire to live for art's sake, a proceeding which is likened to "the declaration of a beauty past her prime that she will have nothing more to do with men."

In "Heroic Literature" "John Eglinton" confesses the difficulties which await the poet who once more attempts to find his theme in man. He regards as signs of the absence of poetic inspiration in modern life, the revival of the heroic literature of Ireland, and the experiments of Morris with the Norse and Teutonic legends. With regret he recalls the heroic period when we carried latent within ourselves all the arts, sciences, and inventions, all the joys and virtues which have since proceeded from us, taking shape outside ourselves. Then man, "a great sombre fellow, shouting his pedigree at you, when he spoke to you, knew all that he owned and clearly marked the frontiers outside which he owed homage to the visible powers." His deeds were great and he was a fitting subject for heroic song. But what is the figure which now offers itself to the eyes of the modern poet? Not Finn, nor Ajax, nor Cuchulain, but Livingstone, Gordon, or Burton, who suggest "a pathological rather than a poetic treatment on the side of their intercourse with the gods." Sorrowfully this process of decay in man is traced until

> "At last he rolls bankrupt on the ground, a shell, his power gone from him, civilisation like a robe whirled down the stream out of his reach in eddies of London and Paris, the truth no longer the ichor of his being, but a cloudy evaporated mass of problems above his head—this is he, *homo sapiens*, poor, naked, neurotic, undeceived ribless wretch—make what you can of him, ye bards!"

It is to Wordsworth that "John Eglinton" would have the poet turn his steps. In the *Lyrical Ballads* he sees what we may get from the man who sings his own joys and experiences casting the poetic light upon the "turbid and dull world of civic action." If it has hapened to poetry, as to philosophy and religion, that they must be sought in the individual, why should he despair? "It is from the poet's soul that the poetic light is cast upon the world and not from the world upon the poet's soul"; the changed conditions are an advantage, for they throw the poet back upon himself, to the great world of his own imagination. The warrior is no longer the hero of an age which demands the realisation of the ideal. "The poem that is to justify the modern world must, in the first place, be a man." It must be a song of victory, of the virtue of man, which will restore to him a sense of his own identity and his own greatness.

Politics, so long the sole manifestation of vitality in Ireland, is the touchstone with which every Irishman is tested. The author of *Pebbles from a Brook* has had to answer the inevitable challenge and to declare his political views, which are summed up in the essay on "Regenerate Patriotism." In a country

which refuses to recognise all finer shades of opinion and where political labels are distributed on the most elementary principle, "John Eglinton" is an anomaly. His attitude is highly disconcerting, inasmuch as it interferes with the popular system of classification. There seems to be a tacit understanding that all criticism of national aspirations must come from the side of the enemy, for whom a reply is usually ready. But when the critic cannot be stigmatised as hostile to national ideals, the problem of silencing him becomes more difficult. The stereotyped reproaches are ineffective and consternation reigns until some one remembers a well-known device, and the offender is reviled as a wretch who dares to "calumniate" his native land. "John Eglinton's" failure to reach a becomingly lyrical note in his expression of nationality and patriotism has secured for him the unqualified hostility of vociferous patriots. As he says, "popular patriotism submits with no better grace than popular religion to the criticism of philosophy." Undismayed, however, he has submitted the idea of patriotism to an analysis by no means usual in Ireland, where sentiment reaches a religious fervour and holds undisputed sway. In his attitude towards "unregenerate patriotism" he reveals himself as still holding the view of the individual in society which he put forward in *Two Essays on the Remnant*. As civilisation seemed to him to have no use for the "lapsed masses of idealism," so, too, he argues, patriotism suffers as culture and civilisation develop. Culture gives men resources within themselves, civilisation diminishes "the external factors of patriotism," as wars become

fewer and states grow so unwieldy that the individual can no longer be identified with them. The nation is no longer an organic whole in which each has his work and "all inequalities are compensated in the unifying sense of nationality." A man can no longer say "this is my own, my native land," for "it has come to belong to a small number of the sons and daughters of privilege." As for historical memories, a country's past is not necessarily more creditable than the past of any individual, while "all the battles that were ever fought and resulted in victory to the rights of man, were fought on the same side." Therefore he concludes:

> "Patriotism, in fact, in the old sense, is only possible when the whole life interest of the individual is comprised within that of the patria. When individuality is hatched and has become independent of the community, the relation of the individual to it must suffer a change. Instead of a receiver he becomes a giver."

The regenerate patriotism which he would substitute, is based upon the relation of a man with his fellow-men and with nature, rather than upon his relation to the state. This is the theme of the poetry which the essayist admires, the poetry of Wordsworth, in whom "that love of country is once again blended, as traditional patriotism traditionally is, with religion." Here the veil which separates us from nature is torn aside, we see her beauty, holiness, and wisdom, she is no longer Maya or illusion, but "an extension of ourselves, our guide, support, and teacher." Our native land is but a part of nature, and as such we should love it. How remote is this ideal from the actual conditions of patriotism in Ire-

land, which is described as "querulously claiming our errant affections!" The poet must obey the law of individual freedom if he is to attain unto himself, for to him, if he be true to his nature, is intrusted the soul of the nation. His country may protest, but it will ultimately recognise that such as he can alone confer true glory upon the patria.

To Gaelic jingoists "John Eglinton's" literary criticism is no less suspect than his patriotism. His attitude towards and his judgments in Irish literature have usually been unfavourable to popular illusion. The essays which have been reprinted in *Literary Ideals in Ireland* represent his part in the controversy which was carried on in the Dublin *Daily Express* when Standish O'Grady, "Æ.," W. B. Yeats, and others were preparing the way for the Irish Dramatic Movement. Eglinton argued that while Irish legends lent themselves to poetic or dramatic treatment no less than those of ancient Greece, it was doubtful if anything greater than belles-lettres could come from a determined preoccupation with them. National literature he defined as "the outcome and expression of a strong interest in life itself," whereas "belles-lettres seek a subject outside experience." If our poets look away from themselves and their age, if they see in the past merely an escape from the present, their art is not the expression of the life around them and cannot therefore be either representative or national. The poetry which has been most a fact of life in England is the Wordsworthian, so Eglinton warns Yeats of the danger of the latter's contempt of popular poetry. Art for the sake of art may achieve "the occult triumphs of the symbolist school," but in time

"humanity will return its indifference in kind, and leave it to the dignity and consolation of unpopularity." "John Eglinton" criticises the attitude common to both poets and politicians, who imagine that, because Ireland is the scene of a heroic past, Irishmen thereby become endowed with special virtues. He urges us to prove our worth and to feel that "we have as good a right to exist on this soil and on our own merits as Finn or Cuchulain."

Nobody desires more ardently than "John Eglinton" to see Ireland possessed of a national literature, but his definition of the term places him in opposition to the means popularly employed to achieve that end. In *Bards and Saints* will be found the essence of his criticism of the Gaelic revival, particularly in the Essay on "The De-Davisisation of Irish Literature." In Davis he sees the root of all the confusion which lies at the bottom of the Irish Language Movement.

> "What the Irish Nationalist, as instructed by Davis, means by 'National literature' is not the interpretation of the soul of a people, still less the emancipation of the national mind by means of individual utterance, but . . . the expression of such sentiments as help to exalt an Irishman's notion of the excellence and importance of the race to which he belongs."

Such is the keynote of all that he has written of recent years upon the question of Irish literature. He has pointed out the fatal effect upon the intellectual life of Ireland of banishing from literature those fundamental ideas of religion and morality whose discussion has everywhere led to some broad agreement as a basis of national existence. In *Dana,* the review of which he was editor, "John Eglinton" once wel-

comed the recrudescence of religious bigotry as "one of the most genuine signs of the new awakening in Irish life." The fact that Irishmen sedulously avoid religious and other topics upon which they have "agreed to differ," simply means that in certain respects Ireland is just emerging from the seventeenth century. We make a mistake in recommending tolerance prematurely, as was suggested once in *Dana,* instead of insisting upon an understanding at whatever cost, as was the case in all the countries where national literature is not wholly divorced from the main problems of life. Political independence, the revival of the Irish language, what can they be but the hollow forms of nationality, when all the vital factors in national life are banished from literature and conversation? Ireland has never made up her mind definitely upon the religious question. Her Catholicism is peculiarly Protestant in spirit, and, as Eglinton suggests, may possibly be the unnaturally developed offspring of what at one time bid fair to be the Celtic, as distinct from the Greek and Roman, Church. The Irish language itself is the utterance of youthful paganism, and is by no means the expression of the piety with which some would associate it. In view of the intellectual paralysis which this avoidance of essentials has engendered in Irish life, it is not surprising that he should be a consistent critic of all the forces which make for the continuation of this state of affairs. This morbid anxiety on the subject of patriotism, this constant preoccupation with a heroic past, cannot give birth to a genuinely national literature, which will reflect the mind and soul of a people. "It is by a thought movement, rather than

by a language movement, that Ireland will have to show that it holds the germs of true nationality."

Detachment is the dominant note of "John Eglinton's" philosophy. He moves serenely in the din of party cries, uttering a word of quiet criticism or exhortation, to the discomfiture of the factions, whose mechanical vociferations pass for manifestations of Irish political life. He writes but rarely, and each of his essays is a perfect gem of scintillating thought whose flashes illuminate some obscure corner of popular belief. At one time we find him fighting on behalf of the Anglo-Irishman and his literature, at others he is engaged in a damaging original criticism of the Irish language. As might be expected, the author of *Two Essays on the Remnant* does not accuse the Gael of being "impractical." All the more effective, therefore, is his contention that Irish "retains a rude flavour as of a language which has never properly been to school." It is not, however, only the popular idols of language and patriotism which Eglinton regards with the eye of critical scepticism. In the short-lived *Shanachie* he treated St. Patrick in a spirit which indicated complete freedom from the associations that have rendered this subject peculiarly sacrosanct. Speaking of our inability to portray saints and our tendency to make heroes of malefactors, he indulges in some characteristic *boutades* at Milton's expense. Thanks to the author of "Paradise Lost," having learned to know Satan, we rather like him, and we feel that when he fell, "all that was the least interesting in heaven fell with him." Finally the author warns us that "we must cease to treat celestial matters until we can state Jehovah's

case with more sympathetic insight." It will be seen that the intellectual tradition to which his countrymen Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw belong can also claim a representative in "John Eglinton." It is not, however, that he is prone to paradox. George Moore probably summed him up when he said that he was a doubter, "he doubts even of his own beautiful prose."

Scepticism is at the root of this criticism of art and life. The *Two Essays* are the exasperated outburst of a young idealist at the first contact of disillusionment. Since then he has lost many of the enthusiasms which still inspire his contemporaries. *Pebbles from a Brook* contains the same fundamental ideas as that early plea on behalf of the "unemployed idealist," but there is more restraint, and that restraint is reflected in the style. The essays in *Dana* and the little volume *Bards and Saints* everywhere reveal the same attitude of inquiry towards the aim and value of progress as understood in modern civilisation. "John Eglinton" is ever in search of a "new spiritual initiative." He turns from "the continual tabulation of facts," which is science but not knowledge, to the poet who alone can give us trouble and wisdom. He sees that the men who have most profoundly affected human thought have been the Rousseaus, Wordsworths, Thoreaus, and Tolstoys, those who have preached a gospel resolutely opposed to that which governs modern "progress." In this direction, therefore, he conceives our hopes of development to lie. In an essay in the *Irish Review* a couple of years ago he returned to his first profession of faith in the "Chosen People," "the intel-

lectuals," as he now calls them. "It is amongst these," he writes, "that a new idea might conceivably arise which might even lead ultimately to a new form of civilisation." It is easy to understand his dissatisfaction with what is the only approach to a stirring of the national soul in Ireland. But political and linguistic independence cannot give Ireland that real personality which comes from the existence of an inner life. The work of "Æ." and his disciples has made this fact a point of departure, and it was, no doubt, with that in mind that "John Eglinton" penned the phrase quoted above. Here he sees an effort towards effecting a thought revival in which the outworn shibboleths of intellectual stagnation will be cast into the melting-pot, whence will emerge a new and living creed. This creed must not harden into dogma, it must be flexible, the ever-changing expression of the human soul. As he once expressed it, "to embrace a dogma is the acknowledgment of intellectual failure." It is the dogmatism of Irish life which is responsible for his own scepticism. It has forced into a negative, purely critical, position one who might have been a great transcendental teacher. As it is, he remains one of the most beautiful prose-writers in modern English.

LORD DUNSANY : FANTAISISTE.

LORD DUNSANY: FANTAISISTE.

IF a French word best indicates the nature of Lord Dunsany's talent, it is not that he is in any respect an alien in the imaginative revival which lies back of the literary renascence in Ireland. His work is as much a part of the movement which has given us the fantasies of Synge as is that of James Stephens. Yet Lord Dunsany, it must be admitted, is something of an enigma in contemporary Anglo-Irish literature. The man himself gives the impression of a strange contradiction of personality. Coming of old aristocratic stock, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, preserves in some degree the traditional habits and characteristics of his race. He was educated at Eton, and served for some time as an officer in the Coldstream Guards. His tall, athletic stature gives him the air of the typical Britisher of his class. One could imagine him, correctly attired in the conventional silk hat and morning coat of Bond Street, passing undistinguished amongst his fellows in the Grand Stand at Goodwood.

In point of fact, Lord Dunsany is known as a cricketer and sportsman to many who know and care nothing for the poet that is in him. His is, as it were, a double life; on the one side his activities in the world of sport and society, on the other his adventures into the world of letters. For, let us hasten to add, the immaculate, "clean-limbed Englishman"

we have pictured him does not correspond so much to what he is, as what, but for the grace of God, he might have become. Of his social existence as Lord Dunsany there is no doubt, but even in his personal appearance there is just that element of carelessness which betrays the presence of preoccupations not altogther confined to conventions sartorial and otherwise. In short, he fails in some slight, but noticeable, details to conform exactly to type, thus creating a curious impression of duality. He is almost what he, at first sight, seems to be, but "not quite!" There lingers about him some touch of Bohemianism, an indifference to externals, which at once suggests the other Lord Dunsany.

To have invented a theogony is, in these days of realism, no common achievement. Where his contemporaries are content to revive the imaginative world of Irish legend, Lord Dunsany has created a mythology of his own. The first public revelation of this new theogony was *The Gods of Pegana,* which appeared in 1905. This extraordinary little book introduced us to the weird regions of Pegana and made known, by a series of myths, the strange beings which inhabited them. In the Preface we are told: "There be islands in the Central Sea, whose waters are bounded by no shore and where no ships come—this is the faith of their people." Then follows the hierarchy of the Pegana gods: "Before these stood gods upon Olympus, or ever Allah was Allah, had wrought and rested MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI." Mana is the chief deity who made all the lesser gods, and thereafter rested, lulled in his sleep by Skarl, who sits at his feet beating a drum. "Some say that the

Worlds and the Suns are but the echoes of the drumming of Skarl, and others say that they be dreams that arise in the mind of Mana because of the drumming of Skarl, as one may dream whose rest is troubled by sound of Song." So long as Skarl beats his drum Mana will sleep, while the gods achieve their mysterious purposes, and the worlds go on. But when at last the arm of Skarl tires, silence shall startle Pegana "like thunder in a cave," Mana will awaken, and the End of all things will come. "There may arise some other god whom Skarl may serve, or it may be that he shall perish; but to Skarl it shall matter not, for he shall have done the work of Skarl."

The more important of the minor deities created by Mana were Kib, "Sender of Life in all the worlds"; Mung, "Lord of all deaths between Pegana and the Rim"; Sish, "the Destroyer of Hours," and Slid, "whose soul is by the Sea." These are they who "sat in the middle of Time," after Mana had rested, and said: "Let us make worlds and amuse Ourselves while Mana rests. Let Us make worlds and Life and Death, and colours in the sky; only let Us not break the silence upon Pegana." The worlds and suns were peopled first by one who was "to seek and never to find out concerning the wherefore of the making of the gods," this was the comet, "the Bright One with the flaring tail." Then came the Watcher, "the Moon, with his face wrinkled with many mountains and worn with a thousand valleys, to regard with pale eyes the games of the small gods." Lastly, the gods said: "Let us make one to wonder. . . . And they made Earth to wonder, each god by the uplifting of his hand according to his

sign. And the Earth was." Such was "the first game of the gods." But after a million years Kib grew weary and raised his hand "making the sign of Kib." The Earth became covered with beasts for him to play with, and when the other gods marvelled, Kib said: "This is Life," whereupon they feared lest Kib should one day make men and endanger "the secret of the gods." Mung, jealous of this Life created by Kib, "sent down Death among the beasts, but could not stamp them out."

A million more years passed, and the second game of the gods wearied Kib, just as the first had done Making his sign, he made men out of beasts, and the gods, jealous of their secret, "set a veil between Man and his ignorance that he might not understand. And Mung was busy among Men." But when they saw Kib playing his new game they joined in, and they will play until Mana arises to rebuke them, saying: "What do ye playing with Worlds and Suns and Men and Life and Death?" Mana will laugh at them, as we learn from the chaunt of the gods, because of their playing with Worlds and Suns, and then they will hastily put these things behind them and there shall be Worlds no more, for "most withering is the laughter of MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI."

It is difficult in a summary to give an adequate idea of the wealth of fantasy and imagination displayed by Lord Dunsany in the development of this mythological narrative. The mere enumeration of the multitude of lesser gods each connected with some weirdly beautiful circumstance in the evolution of Pegana, the nomenclature itself, is marvellous: Limpang-Tung, the god of mirth and of the melodious minstrels;

Yoharneth-Lahai, the god of little dreams and fancies, and the thousand home gods; Hish, the Lord of Silence, " who husheth the mouse and all the whispers in the night; he maketh all noises still. Only the cricket rebelleth. But Hish hath set against him such a spell that after he hath cried a thousand times his voice may be heard no more." Habaniah, the Lord of glowing embers; Triboogie, the Lord of Dusk, " who sitteth in a corner far off from Habaniah and speaketh to none "—these are but a few of the children of Dunsany's fancy. For all their fantasy, however, the gods of Pegana succeed in impressing one with a sense of their identity. They are conceived after a plan, the logic of imagination has gone towards their creation, so that the reader carries away an impression of coherence. The mythology of Lord Dunsany bears the true imprint of its kind. What greater praise can be awarded it than to say that it possesses precisely those elements which make all legendary and mythological stories convincing? The various figures and myths are coloured by a vivid imagination, yet preserve a relation to natural phenomena sufficient to make them credible interpretations of natural mysteries.

There is hardly a cosmic event, hardly a stage of terrestrial evolution omitted from Dunsany's ingenious embroideries upon a theme which one had believed exhausted by the efforts of primitive times. The audacity of challenging attention for such an undertaking alone merits the reward it seeks. Hear how the rivers Eimes, Zanes and Segástrion revolted against the laws of the worlds, passed beyond their boundaries and joined together to overwhelm cities,

saying, "We now play the game of the gods and slay man for our pleasure." But the gods could not permit this encroachment upon their rights, so they set about crushing the power of the waters. "Mung went down into a waste of Afrik, and came upon the drought Umbool as he sat in the desert upon iron rocks, clawing with miserly grasp at the bones of men and breathing hot." Drought, being the servant of death, is commended by his master to quell the floods. "Friend of Mung! go thou and grin before the faces of Eimes, Zanes, and Segástrion, till they see whether it be wise to rebel against the gods of Pegana." So Umbool grinned before the rivers, and "because the grinning was like death in a hot and hideous land, therefore they turned away, . . . and the waters sank."

The Gods of Pegana, however, is concerned principally with the presentation of the various elements of the theogony of Pegana. Once Lord Dunsany had invented the genesis of the worlds, and the gods whose playthings they are, the accumulation of myths about the phenomena resulting from this creation was inevitable. More naturally, therefore, his second book, *Time and the Gods* (1906) is rich in examples of mythus. The fable of Time's struggle against the gods, which gives its title to the book, relates how the beautiful city of Sardathrion was destroyed by Time. This was the favoured abode of the gods, which they believed eternal, because it had not succumbed, like other cities, to the ravages of the years. But "furtive Time," hearing their boasts, overwhelmed Sardathrion, for though he is the servant of the gods, he threatens them and is feared,

because he will some day destroy the gods themselves. In "The Coming of the Sea," Lord Dunsany imagines the attempt made by Slid and his host of waves to capture the green earth. First the gods sent their four winds against Slid, who by his waves overcame them, and the winds "limped back to their masters" and said:—

> "We have met this new thing that has come upon the earth and have striven against its armies but could not drive them forth; and the new thing is beautiful but is very angry and is creeping towards the gods."

Then the gods sent "a great array of cliffs" to defend them, but the rocks were shattered, until the downlands were called upon to halt the army of Slid. "Sternly the white cliffs stood on guard," and Slid could not advance, so he rested his legions and "crooned a song such as once long ago had troubled the stars." This song went moaning on, "awaking pent desires," till the rivers heard it and crept down to find the sea. "They came behind the white cliffs, splitting them here and there, thus making an opening for the army of the waves. "The gods were angry with their traitorous streams," but could not arrest the advance of Slid. Half the world was overwhelmed when they appealed to their "eldest born," the great mountain of black marble, named Tintaggon.

Tintaggon stood firm against Slid, who lashed him furiously with his waves, until finally, having launched his five oceans against him in vain, he retreated holding what he had conquered. "All that Tintaggon had guarded against Slid he gave back to the gods;

the sea lies beaten at his feet. But the fight may one day be resumed:

> "Sometimes in their dreams, the war-scarred warriors of Slid still lift their heads and cry their battle-cry; then do dark clouds gather about Tintaggon's swarthy brow and he stands out menacing . . . the gods know well that while Tintaggon stands They and Their world are safe; . . . whether Slid shall one day smite Tintaggon is hidden among the secrets of the sea."

The various legends of *Time and the Gods* are all equally informed with the spirit of fantasy and many are of great poetic power. "Night and Morning," "The South Wind," and "A Legend of the Dawn," are typical of the charm with which Lord Dunsany's imagination can invest the commonest phenomena. Who but he could have suggested, for example, that the moisture in the South Wind comes from the tears of the prophet Ord? Ord by chance perceived the Hands of Time and Fate stretched over the heads of the gods to make a move in the great game they play, with men for pieces, "to while eternity away." To prevent the knowledge of this passing from Ord, the gods deprived him of his senses one by one, until at last they took his soul and fashioned out of it the South Wind:

> ". . . . and well the South Wind knows that he hath once understood somewhere and long ago, and so he moans to the islands and cries along southern shores, I have known." . . . But all things sleep when the South Wind speaks to them, and none heed his cry that he hath

known . . . and the Secret of the gods is safe."

Interesting as Lord Dunsany is, as a modern mythologist, his talent for narrative has not been confined to the cosmic adventures of the dwellers in Pegana. Already in *The Gods of Pegana* we glimpsed something of the relations between mortals and immortals. There was Yonath, the first of the prophets, whose message was: "There be gods upon Pegana," and who, amongst many wise sayings related, uttered the warning: "Seek not to know." But when Yonath was dead, men still sought knowledge, and elected Yug to be their prophet, for Yug said: "I know all things. And men were pleased." The wisdom of Yonath was forgotten, and Yug, Alhireth-Hotep, and their successors all proclaimed their knowledge of the gods, until Mung "made the sign of Mung" and they passed away. In time, however, they learnt caution, by such lessons as that which came to Imbaun. A pestilence fell upon the land and the King sent for the prophet to learn if he would die. Imbaun cautiously hints that it is possible, and is led away. Whereupon "there arose prophets in Aradec who spake not of death to Kings."

Time and the Gods contains more fables of men than the preceding volume, though here too, the concern of the author is with their relations with the gods. "The King that was not" tells how Althazar had carven images made which he proclaimed the gods of Pegana. The angered gods took a terrible vengeance. "It is not enough that Althazar shall die . . . he must not even have ever been." The

manner in which they excuted their purpose is noteworthy in its simplicity:

> "Then said the gods: Spake we of Althazar, a King?" And the gods said: Nay we spake not. And the gods said: Dreamed we of one Althazar? And the gods said: Nay, we dreamed not."

Thus he passed into oblivion, and "Runazar hath no King nor ever had one."

The finest story in the book is that entitled "In the Land of Time," which ranks with the best work Lord Dunsany has written. Unfortunately its length makes quotation inadequate and almost impossible. The legend relates how Karnith Zo, King of Alatta, set out to conquer Time. His armies were clamouring to be led against the nighbouring people of Zeenar, but the King, having observed the damage inflicted by Time, decided to attack the real enemy of his people. The armies march out, and as the days and weeks and months pass they seem to be nearing the dwelling of Time, for along their route they find clear evidence of his passage, the furrowed and lined faces of old people who told how Time had smitten them "with his five claws"; cobwebs and ruins, rusted chains and crumbling walls—all testified to the presence of the enemy, but a year's marching had not discovered him. At length Zarnith and the remains of his armies arrived at the city of Time. The doors of the houses swing on rusty hinges, the stones crumble to the touch and over all broods "age and the full hush of things bygone and forgotten." A castle on the hill is pointed out by the few aged

inhabitants as the stronghold of Time, so the King decides to storm it. As they mounted the first ridge, "Time hurled five years against them," and so he continued until:

> ". . . . the knees of the army stiffened and their beards grew and turned grey, and the hours and days and the months went singing over their heads, and their hair turned whiter and whiter: . . . the years rushed on and swept the youth of that army clear away, till they came face to face under the walls of the castle of Time with a mass of howling years and found the top of the slope too steep for aged men. Slowly and painfully, harassed with agues and chills, the King rallied his aged army that tottered down the slope."

They struggle wearily back, hoping to reach their native city. Along the route they recognise where the hand of Time has pressed heavily, but are themselves recognised by none. When at last they reach Alatta they find the gates rusted, weeds growing on the walls and the houses old and weather-beaten. They expected to find their sisters and sweethearts of a few years ago, but "saw only old women wrinkled with great age, and knew not who they were." Then they knew that Time had conquered and taken their city, and enslaved its people, while they went out to seek his destruction.

These narratives contain a hint of the fabulous cities and strange peoples whose histories are recorded in the later works of Lord Dunsany. Whereas *The Gods of Pegana* and *Time and the Gods* dealt with worlds and deities, their successors relate the

adventures of men and cities. To this second phase belong all the stories published since 1906, *The Sword of Welleran* (1908), *A Dreamer's Tales* (1910), *The Book of Wonder* (1912), *Fifty-One Tales* (1915), and *Tales of Wonder* (1916). These, again, may be divided into "tales of mystery and imagination" and tales of the bizarre and grotesque. As the former are more nearly related to the Pegana myths, they call next for consideration.

The trait common to both is the identity of theme which underlies them, the constant warfare between the mysterious forces of Time or Change and the gods and men who rule the worlds and cities of the author's dreams. In the earlier narratives the struggle was expressed in terms of mythology, the forces clashed in the persons of the deities who personified them. Now we hear of wanderers in lands whose strange sonorous names are as remote as anything we heard of Pegana. The fact that their adventures are supposed to take place on the earth we inhabit does not lessen the marvel of what befalls them. "The Fall of Babbulkund," for example, brings us to the first of those weird and beautiful cities whose very names breathe wonder, and which have become familiar to readers of Lord Dunsany. As W. B. Yeats has said, this poet "has imagined colours, ceremonies and incredible processions that never passed before the eyes of Edgar Allan Poe or of De Quincey, and remembered as much fabulous beauty as Sir John Mandeville." The marvellous beauties of Babbulkund are only equalled by those of "Perdóndaris, that famous city," to which "Idle Days on the Yann" is the introduction:

> "I will arise now and see Babbulkund, city of marvel. She is of one age with the earth; the stars are her sisters. Pharaohs of the old time coming conquering from Araby first saw her, a solitary mountain in the desert, and cut the mountain into towers and terraces. . . . She is carven, not built; her palaces are one with her terraces, there is neither join nor cleft. Here is the beauty of the youth of the world. She deemeth herself to be the middle of the Earth, and hath four gates facing outward to the nations."

Such is the typical scene of these adventures, whose burden is always the same. No matter how far the travellers advance, by whatever vast desert their path may lie, they return with a tale of beauty that, for all its splendour, is perishable. Babbulkund is annihilated by the sands, for whose victory we are prepared by such hints as:

> "All that night the desert said many things softly and in a whisper, but I knew not what he said. Only the sand knew and arose and was troubled and lay down again, and the wind knew."

The pilgrims in search of Babbulkund hear great stories of her wonders as they approach the city. The winged lions that flit like bats, the alcove of opal where the King sits, the gorgeous streets and exquisite devices of which the returning travellers tell—all are gone when the newcomers arrive. For the doom of Babbulkund had come. A wind had arisen out of the South, "and the sand lifted and went by in great shapes, all whispering . . . and there were little cries among them and the sounds of passing away."

Similarly, Perdóndaris, the rival of Babbulkund among the cities of Lord Dunsany's vision, was wrecked by "something swift and wonderful." But who can forget its great gate of ivory "carved out of one solid piece," the tusk of a monster so frightful that the mere thought of it drove the travellers away? Then there is Andelsprutz, the city that went mad, and whose soul rose up into the mountains and joined those of Babylon and Nineveh; and Bethmoora, which was suddenly left desolate, after three mysterious travellers delivered their unknown message at her gates. "Most believe it was a message from the Desert himself . . . for he would have Beethmoora silent and undisturbed, save for the weird love he whispers."

Elements of the grotesque and horrible are scattered through most of Lord Dunsany's stories. We find such monsters as a spider "larger than a ram," whose eyes were little, "but in which there was much sin"; Tharagavverug, "the dragon-crocodile," whose hide was of steel, and whose cry was like the sound of a great church bell that had become possessed of an evil soul, and numerous like denizens of strange places. But in the later books, the horrible ceases to be merely an incidental, and frequently constitutes the main interest of a story. "The Hashish Man" in *A Dreamer's Tales* belongs absolutely to the tradition of Poe or Ambrose Bierce. The Emperor Thuba Mleen, who caused the inhabitants of Beethmoora to flee, as we here learn, is one of the most fearful creations of a disordered fancy. Poe would not have linked up such a story with the poetic reverie of Bethmoora's desolation. The information that Thuba

Mleen " is in some way connected with the Desert on his mother's side " is typically Dunsany. But Poe might have pictured this scene in which a sailor is tortured :

> " They had torn long strips from him, but had not detached them, and they were torturing the ends of them far away from the sailor. . . . and every time he groaned Thuba Mleen tittered."

Equally dreadful is " Poor Old Bill," where we are introduced to those strange seafaring men who figure so frequently in recent stories by Lord Dunsany. Old Bill belongs to the race of pirates beloved of Jack B. Yeats, but his cannabalistic experience is unusual. Normally Lord Dunsany's pirates stop at killing men; they do not eat them. In fact, if Old Bill had not spared one of his victims, he would not have been haunted by the latter's soul, and would have avoided the necessity of cannibalism! Captain Shard, whose acquaintance we make in *The Book of Wonder,* is the more usual type of Dunsany seaman, and belongs obviously to the same class as that crew with whom the author spent his " Idle Days on the Yann," the first of his seafaring adventures.

The horror of these stories is often lessened by an element of grotesqueness or of poetry. The two examples cited represent rather the extreme to which Lord Dunsany has gone in an opposite direction to the fables of Pegana. " Ebb and Flow," from the same collection as " The Hashish Man," is a perfect instance of this process of mitigation. The body condemned to be without burial and, therefore,

consigned to the mud of a great river is a macabre conception :

> " They took me down a stairway that was green with slimy things, and so came slowly to the terrible mud. There, in the territory of forsaken things, they dug a shallow grave."

The nameless horrors of the filthy slime are evoked in a series of powerful pictures, but the redeeming fantasy of the author raises the story to the level of poetry. As the years pass the unburied narrator notes the signs of change. His resting place becomes firmer, nature begins to adorn the hideous desolation of the river's mud, the traces of human life grow fewer until finally London passes away. Wild roses bloom where once the wharves had stood, and the birds come to take possession of what used to be the city. At first the birds are afraid of this half-buried thing, which even the rats shunned when the river flowed there, but soon they lose their fears and begin to sing :

> " Then when there was nothing to be heard in London but the myriad notes of exultant song, my soul rose up from the bones in the mud and began to climb up the song heavenwards."

The mood of this story is characteristic, and it is the mood of Lord Dunsany's later works, beginning with *The Book of Wonder* in 1912. As distinguished from the early stories of Pegana, and those relating to the men of Yarnith, Averon and Zarkandhu, they have a more " modern " note. There is even a suggestion of cynicism in some of the shorter " parables " which does not harmonise with the ensemble of Lord

Dunsany's work. Instead of casting his scenes solely in those mythical regions of Mana-Yood-Sushai, or the fabulous country of Babbulkund and Perdóndaris, he shows a tendency of late to mix the real with the ideal; to carry the adventure through the circumstances of ordinary life to the world of dreams. "The Kith of the Elf-Folk," from *The Sword of Welleran,* is the first example of this procedure, which has since been developed with greater skill, as witness "The Coronation of Mr. Thomas Shap" and "How Nuth could have practised his Art upon the Gnoles," in *The Book of Wonder.* In his latest manner Lord Dunsany gives further proof of the amazing abundance of his imagination.

Both *Fifty-one Tales* and *Tales of Wonder* are marked by this "modernity" of touch which admirers of the author are disposed to deprecate. The best story in *Tales of Wonder* is that which is written in his earlier manner, "A Story of Land and Sea." This is a delightful adventure of pirates, after the heart of Mr. Jack B. Yeats, and tells how the good ship "Desperate Lark" sailed the Sahara, outwitting the naval strategists of a great Power, and waging seawarfare against squadrons of Arab horsemen. The reader is reminded of *The Book of Wonder* and is not surprised to hear that the alternative title of the volume, *The Second Book of Wonder,* has been adopted in America. But this story is the only one attaching to that earlier work, unless it be "The Loot of Looma," whose ghastly suggestiveness would qualify it for inclusion in *A Dreamer's Tales.* The majority of the chapters offer constant points of resemblance to the *Fifty-one Tales.* Such is that

excellent fancy "The Bureau d'Echange de Maux," wherein we learn of an institution providing a choice of misfortune for those wishing to exchange their ills for others that seem less painful, but never satisfying its patrons. It is only necessary to compare "The Bird of the Difficult Eye" with "Thirteen at Table" and "The Three Sailors' Gambit" to see how well Lord Dunsany can preserve the weird and grotesque from the cheap embellishments which mar the first-mentioned story. "Wine at a guinea a bottle that you could not tell from champagne" and "cigars at half-a-crown with a Havana label" might have been left to the purveyors of "smart" magazine fiction. But in both these recent volumes there is enough to justify the faith of those who were lured by the author's original narratives of fabulous beauty and wonder.

The tardy recognition which the prophet has ever received at the hands of his own countrymen must be taken to account for the contrast between the fame of Lord Dunsany in the United States and his comparatively restricted popularity on this side of the Atlantic. An American critic has published a substantial study of his dramatic writings under the title, *Dunsany the Dramatist,* and his plays have been enthusiastically greeted in all the great centres of intellectual activity in America. They have passed from the stage of numerous "Little Theatres" to the playhouses normally consecrated to the commercial drama, and are available in two volumes entitled, the first—unimaginatively—*Five Plays,* the second—characteristically—*Plays of Gods and Men.* The contents of the first, "The Gods of the Mountain,"

"King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior." "The Glittering Gate," "The Golden Doom," and "The Lost Silk Hat," have all been produced in the United Kingdom and in America. The second contains four pieces, "The Laughter of the Gods," "The Queen's Enemies," "A Night at an Inn," and "The Tents of the Arabs," of which only the last mentioned has been performed on this side of the Atlantic, and that, moreover, after a *première* in Paris.

None of Lord Dunsany's work has failed to stand the test of the theatre, a noteworthy circumstance nowadays, when the printed play so frequently stands as testimony either of the playwright's or the producer's failure. Apparently literature and the stage are not incompatible, for Lord Dunsany has made no concessions to popular theatrical convention, his plays belong unmistakably to literature, yet they have been performed in Dublin, London, Manchester and Paris, as well as in the United States. It was at the Abbey Theatre, in 1909, that "The Glittering Gate" announced a new Irish dramatist. The theatre was still in the aftermath left by the crisis of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* when this little piece came on. Nothing more removed from the wild poetry of Synge could be imagined than this picture of Jim and Bill, "lately burglars," and "both dead," before the gate leading to the Unknown. There is, however, a sardonic humour which Synge would have enjoyed in the dialogue of the pair whose dreams of paradise are incongruously coloured by their chief desires when alive. Symbols of their hope and torture are the beer bottles which descend from the air, are wearily uncorked, and always prove to be

empty, while distant cackling laughter greets each disappointment. Finally, when their professional skill enables the burglars to force open the door, the curtain falls upon their disgust.

> Bill (*staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing in which far stars go wandering*)—Stars. Blooming great stars. There ain't no heaven, Jim.

"King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" also owes its performance to the Irish National Theatre, under whose auspices it was performed in 1911. Here Lord Dunsany returned to his own land of fable for the scenes and characters of the play. The enslaved King, Argimenes, is gnawing bones in the work-fields of King Darniak with his fellow slaves. All their immediate desires are concentrated upon bones for food, but their inner life is different. Argimenes with his memories of former grandeur has a wealthier imaginative existence than those, born of slaves, who surround him. The psychology of the master and slave class is very skilfully worked out in the dialogue, which is at once a characterisation and a narrative. The slave-king has but to possess himself of a sword, the symbol of power, to regain his lost kingship. When he finds an old sword, buried in the ground he is digging, he at once takes his place at the head of the others, who, under his leadership, overthrow King Darniak, their oppressor. The finding of the sword is, of course, invested with the dignity of a miracle, and a temple is erected by King Argimenes on the spot where the unknown warrior dropped his weapon. Most effective is the curtain scene when the death of the late King's dog is announced. The

animal had been a source of envy to the slaves because of the good food he ate, and his illness was the occasion of much speculation as to whether his body would be given to them. Great are their fears lest he should die a wasting death, which would deprive his bones of flesh. Many things have happened since these fears troubled the mind of Argimenes, but he cannot at once shake off the past. When they hear the dog is dead the slave instincts are aroused:

> King Argimenes and his men (*savagely and hungrily*)—Bones!
>
> King Argimenes (*remembering suddenly what has happened and where he is*)—Let him be buried with the late King.
>
> Zarb (*in a voice of protest*)—Majesty!

With the exception of Padraic Colum's *Thomas Muskerry,* the Irish Theatre has produced nothing since the death of Synge so worthy of its traditions as these two plays of Lord Dunsany. Just as Colum is the most original worker in the field of peasant drama, apart from Synge, Lord Dunsany is the only Irish dramatist who has in any way emulated Yeats. Though written in prose, as is all his work, "King Argimenes" is essentially a play in the tradition which Yeats has re-created. It belongs to the theatre of beauty because of its form and content. As a stage picture it is impressive, while the text is extraordinarily good. Lord Dunsany is a master of true dramatic speech, he has a perfect sense of the theatre, and consequently he avoids the blurred outlines and slackness of tension which render almost all Yeats's plays ineffective. This is particularly noticeable in

"The Gods of the Mountain," Lord Dunsany's longest and best drama. Here, again, the theme is one such as Yeats might have chosen, had it existed in the legendary lore of Ireland. As it is, the material is supplied by the mythologist of Pegana, who tells how six beggars and a thief impersonate the seven gods of Marma, who are "carved out of green jade," and sit upon the mountain top, "with their right elbows resting on their left hand, the right forefinger pointing upwards." The characterisation of these beggars is perfect. With a minimum of effort their menality is projected, their cunning made operative and its effects unrolled before us.

A more preposterous situation so convincingly developed it would be difficult to find. One is completely carried away by the excitement of the adventure, the pose of the beggars in the attitude of the gods, the gradually weakening scepticism of the people and the anxiety of the impostors who fear the original gods may be found in their accustomed place and attitude. Their uneasiness is by no means allayed when some enquiring person discovers that the green jade gods have, in effect, left their site. The pretenders do not know whether to take this news as a sign of popular credulity and their own success, nor are we sure of what has really happened. Strange sights are seen at night, and it is evident that the gods are present. As one man says—a characteristic fancy of Lord Dunsany—"When we see rock walking it is terrible. . . Rock should not walk. When children see it they do not understand. Rock should not walk in the evening." Then the beggars are seriously disturbed, but the people are

on the point of losing all their doubts, the gods have really come to them. In truth they have come to the city to punish their impersonators. The play closes with wonderful effect as the stone beings enter, point their fingers at the beggars and petrify them in the traditional attitude of the gods upon their thrones. When the worshippers arrive and find them turned to stone they are convinced of their divinity and reproach themselves for having doubted. The irony of the conclusion is as delightful as the tableau itself and worthy of the whimsical humour of the whole conception. It is interesting that this great success should have been obtained by the author with the play nearest in style and manner to his best narrative writing. Compressed to meet the exigencies of the theatre "The Gods of the Mountains" is the quintessence of Lord Dunsany.

"The Golden Doom" is not so successful. The effect of a child's verse scribbled with a piece of gold upon the door of a King is to bring all the wise men and soothsayers to interpret what they believe to be a message from the gods. The children innocently write the lines while waiting at the King's door to beg for a hoop. The prophets see in them the impending doom of their master, who leaves his crown and sceptre as an offering to placate the deities. In the evening the children return and find a golden hoop and stick which they take as an answer to their prayers. The disappearance of both is interpreted by the King and his advisers as an omen that the gods are satisfied. Thus the wise and the innocent are deceived. The fable is a pretty one, but quite Yeatsian in its lack of dramatic quality. We may

regard it as a pleasant demonstration of human credulity.

The most remarkable of the *Plays of Gods and Men* is "A Night at an Inn," which must rank with "The Gods of the Mountain" in the bizarre horror of its effect. Three sailors, the not yet assassinated remnant of a party which has stolen a jewel from the forehead of an Indian god, are waiting for some undefined event in a lonely inn. The place has been hired by a dilapidated Toff, to whom they have handed over the ruby, and for three days and three nights they have been watching expectantly. The Toff awaits the arrival of the priests who have dogged the footsteps of the sailors since their theft, and have gradually reduced their number to three. The purpose of the vigil is to lure the priests to this deserted room and to destroy them—to which end the Toff is seated, with a newspaper in his hand, a visible decoy for the expected visitors. The uncanny perspicacity and cunning of the gentlemen are rewarded; the priests enter stealthily, lured by his skilful tricks, and are stabbed to death by the three sailors.

There is great joy amongst them when they see the successful outcome of their confidence in the Toff. Drinking and boasting, the four adventurers celebrate their victory, and anticipate the fruits of their crime, but their doom is imminent. Stony footfalls draw near, and soon the guilty sailors are cowering in terror before the hideous jade god, who stalks up to the table, places the precious stone in his forehead, and marches out into the lonely moor. Soon his dreadful voice is audible, calling upon his despoilers one by

one to follow him, and they walk after him, drawn by an irresistible force. Finally the far-seeing gentleman of fortune obeys the call he had not anticipated. "I did not foresee it," he mutters disconsolately as, unafraid but puzzled, he goes to the ghastly death of his shrieking companions. A more perfect one-act play it would be difficult to conceive, so wonderfully is the atmosphere created, so tense the suspense, so devastatingly unexpected the *dénouement*.

Not equal praise can be bestowed upon "The Queen's Enemies," another one-acter, the scene of which is laid in an underground temple on the banks of the Nile. The Queen has invited her enemies to a feast in this subterranean chamber, whither they come reluctantly, fearing a trap. But she is so young and beautiful and charming, so candid in her plaintive inability to understand the enmity inspired in her guests, that they are touched by her innocence and overcome their scruples. The audience, too, is fully persuaded of the Queen's ingenuousness, and is prepared to enjoy the act of reconciliation. The danger, one feels, if it exists at all, is that this slender, frail young girl may be killed by her distrustful visitors. Tears and coaxing gradually soften their hostility; they break bread with the Queen, whose sole desire is to repair the wrongs committed by her armies. When all the guests are occupied she tries to slip from the room, but is prevented until an armed guard is placed at the door, lest she return to destroy her enemies. By this time her charm and generosity have conquered, and she is allowed to go out to pray to her secret god. The great door closes behind her, and she mounts to an upper chamber, where her

prayers are raised to Father Nile. At last she has brought together a sacrificial offering worthy of him, and after a humble invocation, she orders a slave to accomplish his predestined task. A moment of awful tension, and then the waters of the great river pour into the room beneath her and enveloping her screaming victims. Ecstatically the Queen murmurs, as she draws away from the water which has risen to the hem of her robe: "Oh, I shall sleep to-night."

As a stage production "The Queen's Enemies" is most effective, and the curtain has the characteristically Dunsanyesque surprise. The action, however, does not develop from the premises with that inevitability which is essential in tragedy. Lord Dunsany has been accused of misogyny, and it may be this Queen, so charming and so cruel, is his variation upon the Virgilian theme: *varium et mutabile semper femina.*

An interesting essay upon the vanity of all things was "The Tents of the Arabs," in which the dramatist was inspired by that mysterious call of the desert so often evoked in the pages of his stories. The King who follows a caravan on its pilgrimage to Mecca lingers a year in the desert forgetful of his office, and finally allows a camel driver to usurp his throne, rather than declare his identity—how typical he is of Lord Dunsany's philosophy. This play makes an interesting contrast with Padraic Colum's *Mogu, the Wanderer,* where it is the vagabond from the desert who rises for a brief moment to royal eminence, and in the end returns to the sands from which he came. It is also the only piece with what may be termed a love motive, for the gypsy girl,

Eznarza, is for much in the King's decision to choose the tents of the Arabs instead of his throne. The passages between these two are the purest poetry, and the author has insensibly made hexameters of such lines as Eznarza's: "We shall hear the sand again, whispering low to the dawn wind," and the King's reply: "We shall hear the nomads stirring in their camps far off because it is dawn." The Syngesque manner of this love-making is most evident in the gypsy's words as the curtain falls:

> "I will raise up my head of a night time against the sky, and the old, old unbought stars shall twinkle through my hair and we shall not envy any of the diademed queens of the world."

There is real satire in "The Laughter of the Gods," which tells how the courtiers of King Karnos prompt the prophet of Thek to announce the destruction of that city, in order that their master may be compelled to return to the great metropolis which he has forsaken. His courtiers are dissatisfied with the monarch's whim for this jungle city, which they are obliged to agree with him in admiring, though they long for the former grandeur of Barbul-el-Sharnak. The prophet reluctantly agrees to make a false prophecy of the imminent doom of Thek, but the sceptical King is not moved, and promises to execute the soothsayer should his words prove false. Both the courtiers and their victim are resigned to the worst, for none of them believes in this concocted prophecy, and the prophet himself guiltily bewails his unfaithfulness to the gods, "who cannot lie." But the deities must at all costs preserve their

reputation for truthfulness, and so it happens that, at the appointed hour, Thek in all its wonderful beauty is annihilated amidst the demoniacal laughter of the gods. Thus the powerful may find themselves helpless in the hands of forces which they invoke for their own selfish purposes, while the sanctity of religion is confirmed for the better governance of the people.

The most obvious delight which one finds in the works of Lord Dunsany is the rich spontaneity of imagination from which they come. There is nothing laboured or tortuous in them, nothing that suggest a painful effort to recapture the wonder and mystery of the past. The archaic simplicity of the Pegana stories is free and natural where premeditated reconstruction seemed inevitable. When one looks for comparisons his originality becomes more apparent, for only the names of Poe and Villiers de l'Isle Adam offer a hope of establishing his literary parentage. But, if some of Lord Dunsany's later stories are worthy of the author of *Contes Cruels*, very few, and these the least typical, belong to the *genre* of Poe. With Villiers de l'Isle Adam he has in common a style and technique often lacking in the vigorous inventions of *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Poe's imagination is, as a rule, scientific, his mysteries are not weird but puzzling. When he is mysterious curiosity is aroused, when Lord Dunsany is mysterious our sense of beauty and wonder is stimulated. The one appeals to the brain and to the nerves, the other captures the spirit and the imagination. Lord Dunsany is as free from the horrors and the semi-scientific mysteries of Poe, as

from the morbidity and the pseudo-psychic curiosities of Mr. Arthur Machen, and to a lesser degree, Mr. Algernon Blackwood. The authors of *The Three Impostors* and *Pan's Garden* are the only contemporaries of Lord Dunsany's, whose work presents any analogies with his. But neither writes out of so deep a vision, and it is only in his weaker moments that Lord Dunsany recalls them.

After so much quotation but few words are necessary to refer to Lord Dunsany's style. The more so, as quotation is by far more illuminating in his case than analysis. Most apparent is the Biblical note, which is not merely a convention used only in adumbrating the mysteries of Pegana. Lord Dunsany has attributed his style to the fact that, as a child, he was encouraged to consider the Bible as literature—the greatest English in the history of the language. Consequently he is that rare phenomenon in Anglo-Irish literature, a writer to whom the Bible has been an influence. The unfamiliarity with the Bible general in Catholic countries has made some critics doubt if Irish writers can ever overcome the absence in their literary tradition of the Authorised Version. Without pressing this argument, which overlooks too readily the creation of a classic style in the Latin countries, we may congratulate ourselves on the possession of this remarkable exception. In Lord Dunsany Ireland has a writer in whom the Biblical spirit replaces the Gaelic tradition which usually supplies the element lacking through the absence of the former.

For this reason, no doubt, his work does not show to the superficial glance the characteristics supposed

to be peculiar to the "Irish school"—that popular fiction. He chose the mythical lands of Bubbulkund and Perdóndaris, instead of the mountains and valleys of Celtic Ireland, but his adventures are as incredible and fantastic as any that Gaelic legend recounts. His work is an intimate part of the rekindling of that flame which has invested the common world of Irish affairs with the glow of Celtic imagination. Yeats, Synge, "Æ." and James Stephens see Ireland illumined by the beauty of old legends and traditions. Lord Dunsany is carried by this re-awakening of the spirit into a world "beyond the Rim." All have the same dream of Beauty, which enables them to transfigure reality. Lord Dunsany's visions appear far away from the life of our time because of his inventiveness, which has allowed him to dispense with even those roots in the past to which his contemporaries cling. The marvels he describes for us are often but the simplest phenomena seen through the eyes of a poet, the rustling of the sands on the seashore, the weird noises of the night, the dancing of butterflies in the sun. At his touch these things take on the wonder and mystery which the Celtic imagination has descried everywhere in nature. That Lord Dunsany should have opened up a new region of fantasy does not constitute him an alien in the old mythological and legendary world of Ireland. His people are of the same stock as their ancestors, children of Romance and Beauty. For having introduced us to this later progeny, thereby enriching our imaginative life, he has but added to the debt which Irish literature owes to him.

AN IRISH PROTESTANT:

BERNARD SHAW.

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I.

AT HOME.

MR. BERNARD SHAW has been the subject of so many essays and monographs that a hesitation to add to the number is natural. It is, however, remarkable that, while English, American, and continental European critics have studied his work, no Irishman has attempted to consider him from an Irish standpoint. We have been concerned rather with those whose efforts have contributed to the building up of a national Anglo-Irish literature, rather than with those who addressed themselves primarily to the English public. In 1876, when Shaw left Dublin for London, there had not yet been initiated that intellectual movement which, some ten years late, gave the impulse to what is known as the Irish Literary Revival. Consequently he necessarily belongs to the older type of Irish writer, who sought in England the material of his art, and the opportunity of self-expression. Probably his course would have been the same, even had he been of the generation as Yeats, "Æ." and Synge. As we shall see, there was but little hope of his being other than an intellectual expatriate, given the circumstances of his birth and the mentality derived from them. This

fact doubtless accounts for the absence of specifically Irish criticism of Shaw, and for the relatively slight influence he has had in Ireland. Nevertheless, his case is one upon which we have to comment, for he is fundamentally an Irish product, familiar, it is true, but not without a special interest for Irishmen.

Just as England is possessed of a type of mind which is summarised by the words "Nonconformist Conscience," Ireland is endowed with an equivalent species known as "the Irish Protestant." That is not to assert any strict identity between the two, but merely to indicate the presence in both countries of a class whose attitude towards life is sharply defined, and differentiated from that of the majority. As all Englishmen outside the Anglican Church have not the Nonconformist Conscience, so the term "Irish Protestant" cannot be applied promiscuously to every non-Catholic Irishman. Both classes are alike in so far as they represent a strong minority whose social, political and religious *intransigeance* brings them into conflict with their more urbane fellow-citizens, and debars them from understanding the views of others. Most parties are capable of making concessions; they can be forced to compromise. The Irish Protestant, and his brother of the Nonconformist Conscience, alone possess sufficient rigidity of mind to resist at all points pressure from without. Even when vanquished politically they remain spiritually impenitent and continue to view the world in the light of their own particular eternal verities.

The element of puritanism which the Irish Protestant has in common with the English Nonconformist has misled certain critics of Bernard

Shaw. They have called him a puritan, and refer to his boyhood as an explanation and a proof of their contention. Nowadays when numerous biographers have made us familiar with the facts we find it difficult to determine any puritanical leanings in the parents of Bernard Shaw. The anecdote cited by him as evidence of the contrary, the discussion between his father, his uncle and a visitor, as to whether the resurrection of Lazarus was "faked," is indeed sufficient. Moreover, the artistic ambitions of his mother, his father's habits, and the rather unorthodox atmosphere of their relations definitely prove the absurdity of Mr. Chesterton's theory as to Shaw's "narrow, puritan home." On the other hand, everything indicates it as having been a typically Irish Protestant home. The father, an outwardly most respectable Civil Servant, the son educated at a veritable stronghold of Irish Protestantism, the social snobbery and hostility towards "Papists"—nothing is wanting to provide the *mise en scène* which surrounds the peculiar development of what is known in Ireland as "the loyal garrison." All the circumstances point to Shaw's having been a potential supporter of the Union. Had he remained with that land agent his destiny would have been to wage war upon "Irish Ireland," that Catholic, nationalistic, un-Fabian community, whose simultaneous enthusiasm for rebellion and reaction is the despair of the uninitiated.

His escape to London lifted Shaw not only out of the family environment but also out of that atmosphere of political and religious concentration which made all but a few Irishmen incapable of disinterested

thinking. Instead of having to bring the dogmas of the factions to the test of every idea, he was permitted by freer conditions to indulge in the natural interplay of ideas, irrespective of their value to the cause of autonomy or dependence. Yet so strong was the Protestant imprint that Shaw did not fail to conform to type in handling the problems which engaged his attention. Being under no necessity of declaring himself for or against England, as would have been necessary in Ireland, he was able to assume the air of impartiality. With the true Irishman's sense of being an alien, he criticised English affairs as a spectator, while the absence of party compulsion allowed him to express himself in terms irreconcilable with orthodox Nationalist criticism. Had he been in Ireland, or had he carried with him the traditional atmosphere, he could not have avoided the inevitable dilemma : either to accept England with all her faults, or to cling to Ireland because of her virtues. In short, as an Irish Protestant, no longer in direct contact with "the enemy," he could utter aloud the thoughts which tradition would have forced him to keep private lest he betray the cause of loyalism to its adversaries.

Whether he has to judge England's domestic or her foreign affairs, Shaw invariably shows traces of his Irish Protestantism. He is unmoved by appeals to patriotic sentiment, but will flatter or antagonise according as his reason dictates. He is no more capable than his ancestral Orangeman of crying "My country right or wrong." Like that of all loyal Irishmen, his recognition of England as his country is an artificial product deriving support from a variety

of motives, none of which would determine the attitude of a genuine English patriot. We have seen how loyalism in Ireland can tranquilly identify itself with military and political insubordination, all in the name of England. Shaw himself has perfectly analysed the loyal Irish Protestant in the preface to *John Bull's Other Island*. There he demonstrates the unemotional purely rationalistic devotion of the Irish loyalist to England. He has got far enough away from the spectacle to envisage it properly, and he concludes rightly that self-interest, including fear of Catholicism, is the essential feature of Unionism. Shaw himself is so situated that this particular fact does not apply to him—except in a limited degree. As a general diagnosis, however, his examination fits his own case. He is bound to England by ties of the head, not of the heart. The analysis of Irish Unionism in *John Bull's Other Island* could have been written only by one of that stock. No Nationalist could have written the play because of its Protestantism, no Protestant in Ireland would have written it because of its cynicism—for such they would term Shaw's candid statement of the inmost secrets of the loyalist bosom.

Commonsense about the War startled the unsophisticated patriotism of men who were about "to do and die," without scepticism or introspection. It was, however, a legitimate expression of Irish Protestantism, and, like the civil war threatened by its active exponents in Ulster, it seemed to be an asset for the enemies of English imperialism. The English public was disturbed by both these strange manifestations of Irish loyalism, while foreign observers were

naturally even more seriously misled by each in turn. Neither was anything more than a characteristic hint that so long as it was to their advantage Irish Protestants would stand by England—force themselves upon her, if the worst came to the worst. Ulster imported arms and drilled in the hope of proving her attachment, Shaw exposed all the reasons for not sympathising with England in the war, and then, as proof of super-loyalty, announced his support of the Allies. The conditions which made English government industrially and politically desirable in Protestant Ireland, made it socially and intellectually advantageous to our Irish Protestant in England, who naturally saw no opportunity for the exercise of his special talents under a régime of militaristic absolutism. If Shaw has been misunderstood, in spite of his excellent intentions, it is because he and his fellow-Protestants in Ireland are outside the range of the average Englishman's patriotic philosophy. The latter will admit, if he cannot understand, the indifference or hostility of Nationalist and Catholic Ireland. He thinks he understands, though in reality he could never admit, the patriotism of the Irish Protestant. The former remains aloof, the latter appears to enter into the imperial fold, but is usually discovered to have prepared a hasty exit, should his interests demand it.

The most succinct and characteristic exposition of Shaw's Irish Protestantism is found, of course, in the play and preface devoted to his country. The now famous contrast between the "hysterical, nonsense-crammed, fact-proof" Englishman, and the Irishman, "clear-headed, sane, hardily callous" to sentimen-

talities—what is this but a cool assumption that the Irish loyalist represents Ireland? A summary so accurate of all the qualities which distinguish Ulster from England is as decided a testimony to Shaw's origins as the vanity which makes him identify Irish Protestantism with Irish nationality. Moreover, who but an Irish Protestant could endeavour to derive any patriotic satisfaction from the fact that Wellington was born in Ireland? For the Nationalist Wellington does not exist. Admiration is reserved for Napoleon, credited with a desire to help Ireland, whose defeat at such hands must be considered an irony of history by most Irishmen. Broadbent is conceived—characteristically—as a caricature of the Liberal anxious to do "the right thing" by Ireland, for the ineffectual, but well-meaning, English Home Ruler is the inevitable butt of Irish Protestant witticism. Nevertheless, so natural is the instinct to depreciate Irish as against English character that we find Broadbent giving a better account of himself than Doyle. The professed impartiality with which he is analysed is merely part of the usual tactics whereby loyal Ireland first of all indicates her freedom from prejudice and then acts in accordance with orthodox English pre-conceptions. Shaw's attempts to belittle Broadbent were recognised as worthless. Both the general public and the critics were delighted with the flattering picture Shaw had drawn of the relations between England and Ireland. The play had an unusually good run in London, and a command performance for the King gave the final mark of approbation to this loyal testimony to England's superiority. The Irish National Theatre significantly

found itself unable to produce the play which had been written for it. Shaw's essentially bourgeois Protestant conception of Ireland, which included the usual "exposure" of thriftlessness and superstition, deprived *John Bull's Other Island* of a repetition in Ireland of its great success. The "loyal co-operation" of both peoples, the fundamental incompatibility of English and Irish patriotism, the mutual incomprehensibility of English and Irish—all these outstanding points had lost their novelty, either through the repetitions of Unionist propagandists, or the repetitions of Irish history.

Needless to say, the attitude of Shaw towards his Nationalist compatriots serves only to emphasise his fundamental Protestantism. Even though his early departure from Dublin saved him from his natural fate, as one of the "loyal garrison," he could not entirely free his system of the hereditary germs of anti-nationalism. The objects of his attack, if not the method, are traditional. At the first public meeting he addressed in Ireland—or at least the first for many years—he began a discussion of Poor Law reform with an onslaught upon the Gaelic language. There was no occasion for any reference to the subject, so we may assume his action to have been based upon the general principle of Irish Protestantism, to ridicule and condemn whatever the Irish people happen to be doing, while pointing out the urgency of what they are *not* doing. Typical is the assumption that a knowledge of his native tongue precludes an Irishman from undertaking any of the educational or social duties which occupy other people. Bernard Shaw is too sharp-witted to imagine that the

Gaelic League interferes with the reform of the Poor Laws. His objection to the Irish language must, therefore, be attributed simply to Irish Protestant prejudice. Gaelic is national, nationalism is the root of all Irish evil, therefore Gaelic must be abolished. This looks suspiciously like the comfortable Unionist theory that Ireland would be a fine country if Irish nationality could be crushed.

Bernard Shaw has confessed that he prefers Englishmen to Irishmen, "no doubt because they make more of me," yet he cannot refrain from adding that he never thinks of the English as fellow-countrymen. This is the quintessence of what Ireland knows as "West Britonism." Our West Britons are so enamoured of England that they desire above all things to mix with Englishmen, their children are educated, if possible, in English schools, and everything is done to eliminate the "vulgar Irish" element from their lives. These people are, for the most part, rewarded like Shaw, by finding West Britonism more profitable than Nationalism. Yet nobody who has lived among them can have failed to get an occasional glimpse of this underlying sense of alienism to which Shaw alludes. Sometimes the feeling comes out in the form of violent Irish patriotism, when in England, on the part of men whose contempt for Ireland, when at home, never lacks an excuse for its expression. At other times more discretion is shown, the outwardly staunch loyalist admitting, in private, that whenever he goes to England he feels himself a foreigner. The deep-seated sense of separate national identity in almost every Irishman is best seen when an English visitor presumes to intervene in a quarrel between

Unionist and Nationalist. As a rule he will say something which arouses the racial instinct, with the result that he is astonished by the combined attack of those who seemed irreconcilable adversaries. Even in the most orthodox circles of Irish loyalty there lingers a genuine aloofness from English ways. Pillars of the Union have been known to derive malicious pleasure from the contemplation of "God's Englishmen" in some characteristic attitude.

English people have been disconcerted by Shaw's ability to view them from the outside, as it were. They should remember that he is merely exercising the privilege of the expatriate. Denationalised Irishmen are all capable of similarly disinterested criticism, and do not refrain from it, even in Ireland, where their position imposes obligations of caution. Shaw has no such obligations, and is, therefore, in a position to say more freely and more generally, what the others have whispered or felt, at least in some particular connection. It is remarkable, for example, how rarely one finds Irishmen, holding positions entrusted to them by England, who act their part with such perfect gravity as the real Britisher. Even highly important officials betray an absence of that profound conviction as to the solemnity and seriousness of England's mission which one expects, and finds, in their English colleagues. Frequently they will, after years of efficient service, shake off the garment of Anglicisation and come forward boldly as ardent and extreme nationalists. It would be easy to mention many prominent men, of Irish birth, who have revealed, some more seriously than others, the essentially unorthodox quality of the Irishman's

allegiance to Great Britain. Shaw is never more faithful to Irish Protestant tradition than when he exhibits scepticism towards the virtues of England, without, however, turning definitely against her. He is sufficiently aloof to be critical, but his instincts draw him so inevitably to the English people that he cannot be really inimical. In short, he is that perfect type of *sans patrie* which the anglicisation of Ireland has produced; men who cannot understand their own compatriots, and must necessarily take refuge among a people with whom they are condemned to be aliens.

Many critics of Bernard Shaw, struggling with the postulate that he is a puritan, have pointed out flaws in the theory. The contradictions can be resolved by reference to his Protestantism. Irish Protestantism differs considerably from English puritanism, although their lines coincide at certain points. The former has the advantage of presenting an undivided religious front, whereas the latter, by the exclusion of the Anglican Church, loses its homogeneity. Shaw himself has explained this solidarity of Episcopalian and Dissenter in Ireland, which enabled him to be educated at a Methodist College, where the minority of pupils belonged to that sect. Social and political circumstances make cohesion possible amongst Irish Protestants. The negative virtue of being non-Catholic dispenses with those dogmatic *nuances* which render intercourse between Anglican and Nonconformist a different problem in England. Shaw had the typical school life of his class, and justly boasts that, in consequence, his is the true Protestantism. As an Episcopalian, he learnt at once to discount sectarian differences, in a manner impossible to his

English co-religionists. The basic principles of Protestantism are of more serious import to the Irishman than to the Englishman, who may permit himself certain *rapprochements* with Catholicism, abhorrent and almost unknown, except by hearsay, in Ireland.

This precious heritage of catholic Protestantism, tolerant of sects, Shaw carried with him to London. Needless to say, it is as incomprehensible there as his patriotism, Irish loyalism and Irish Protestantism being the inseparable twin products of anglicised Ireland. Naturally transplantation, and the special circumstances of Shaw's career, have modified them equally. As an untrammelled Irish Protestant in England he is no more circumspect in his religious than in his political utterances. Provided he can find a pulpit from which to attack what he considers obscurantism, and to defend protestantism, he cares nothing for the specific dogmas usually associated with the place of his address. Thus, he has a noticeable weakness for the Nonconformist Press, and has spoken at the City Temple, without regarding too minutely the points at issue between its incumbent and himself. The fraternising of clergyman and pastor in Ireland furnishes the explanatory clue. Shaw is at home with the Dissenting ministers, just as the Episcopalian Church of Ireland will unite with the Methodists when the common enemy is in sight. His catholicism, where journalistic work is concerned, has shocked even Shavians, who are usually in a position to explain everything. The fact is, this must be considered an amplification of the Irish Protestant theory that points of difference do not matter where an object seems possible of achievement by

unity. Incidentally, we may note that incapacity for compromise is precisely the strength and weakness of the opposing party, Nationalist and Catholic. To allow the policy of a newspaper to deter him from contributing would doubtless appear absurd to Shaw. As well might the Episcopalian parents of the boys who attended his early Methodist college demand Church teaching for their children.

Contrary to what obtains elsewhere, Catholicism in Ireland is puritanical and inartistic, and the task of fostering thought and education has naturally fallen to Protestantism. Consequently, with the puritan scruples of the Irish Protestant are mingled certain preoccupations of an artistic or intellectual order which do not come to chasten the ascetic ardour of the English Nonconformist. Notable is the number of distinguished heretics, in literature, politics and religion, who have been born into Irish Protestantism. To recall their names would be to mention almost every important Irishman in the literary history of the country. Those features of Shaw's teaching which have not fitted into the theory of his puritanism now find an explanation. The leaven of Irish Protestantism, with its pretensions to—at least relative—culture, relieves what would otherwise be the banal manifestations of the Nonconformist Conscience. Art, music and literature have been championed by Shaw in defiance of the puritan tradition which forbids him to smoke or drink, and makes him strangely suspicious of the emotion of sex. Indeed, the latter, especially as it conflicts with the logic of his estimate of art, is more striking than the former, which might be attributed to personal idiosyncrasy. On the

subject of sex, Shaw is frankly and mediævally intolerant. Under the cloak of eugenics, with every available weapon, he has attacked what he calls "voluptuousness"; chastity, or strictly scientific mating, are his ideals. Here again he emphasises his origins. The strictness of the moral code in matters of sex is the great achievement of competitive virtue between Catholic and Protestant Ireland. That Shaw should be unable to escape the imprint of this specifically local product is a tribute to the thoroughness of his Irish Protestant training. He has adapted much of that tradition to the varied needs of his philosophy, but towards this sex question his attitude remains in its primitive simplicity, cutting him off from all sympathy with the whole tendency of modern life.

The author of the most discriminating study of Shaw, Mr. J. McCabe, concludes that no positive success can be claimed for the Shavian philosophy, either in England or elsewhere. We need not be surprised at this, for, without subjecting the Shavian doctrine to detailed examination, we can arrive at a similar conclusion. In Ireland the Irish Protestant is perforce condemned to negation, in that his principle of existence is a denial of national affirmations. It is natural, therefore, that any philosophy based upon Irish Protestantism must be largely negative. In spite of his escape from the traditional atmosphere, Shaw remains, at bottom, in the same ambiguous position as his ancestors. He cannot persuade himself that he is an Englishman, yet England is his country, because he neither likes nor understands his compatriots. He finds himself, in consequence, hovering between Eng-

land and Ireland and is identified with neither. It is amusing to note in Shaw's work the reflection of this unattached state. At one moment he uses "we," meaning England, at another, the pronoun is meant to cover himself and the Irish people. According as his personal feeling dictates, he changes his nationality. This chameleon-like faculty is useless in Ireland. However much he may cry "we Irish," however identical his views may be with those of the Irish people, he is rejected as a foreigner, interfering gratuitously where he has no concern. A letter of his to the Nationalist Press upon the war, though substantially in agreement with the policy advocated by the latter, received the inevitable treatment accorded to the utterance of West Britonism.

Between two national stools Shaw falls to the ground. His opinions lose much of their weight by coming from a doubtful source, for who can tell to what nation he belongs, or to whom he will admit his allegiance? He may like to believe that he is a citizen of the world, and speaks for humanity. We, however, live in a world of nationalities, where even the smallest nation can claim sympathy for its national existence. We may be pardoned, therefore, a natural scepticism towards one whose philosophy by no means embrace the full compass of modern thought, and who would have some difficulty in proving the smallest right to speak for international civilisation. Shaw must confess to a national identity, if he is to escape the suspicion of having no roots in any recognised community. But the Irish Protestant is deprived, in advance, of nationality, otherwise he would cease to exist. He is the artificial creation of

English Government in Ireland, and knows only the patriotism of gratitude for benefits conferred. When he emigrates he must either declare himself a citizen of the country in which he resides, or remain a *sans patrie*. In the former case he is simultaneously divested of his Irish Protestantism. Shaw, as we know, has never been so divested. Consequently, he succeeds only in awaking doubts and hostilities, when he wishes to obtain serious attention.

This wavering, this imprecision where national sentiment is concerned, would appear to have extended to his entire philosophy. Serious readers have ceased trying to reconcile Shaw with himself, his attitude on any given question cannot be foretold, for want of fixity and coherence in his first principles. What are taken to be paradoxes, or deliberate intellectual gymnastics are, in reality, the perfectly serious but disordered expressions of Shaw's point of view. Shavians are right in deprecating the tendency to regard as quips and jokes the greater part of his statements. But it is natural that people should do so, who have not the time nor inclination to disentagle the irrational knot of ideas which have accumulated about Shaw. There is no need to attempt to co-ordinate his criticisms of life, for they are simply a "chaos of clear ideas," each one with a certain separate or abstract value, but incapable of amalgamating so as to constitute a philosophy, in the proper sense of the term. No doubt there are certain social generalities to which Shaw has held with comparative fidelity, such, for example, as liberty. Similarly Irish loyalists are devoted to the abstraction of patriotism, and frown upon "rebellion." Unfortunately many of their practical

deductions from theoretically acceptable premises do not correspond to the aspirations of those for whom they are intended. Thus, as Mr. McCabe has pointed out, Shaw's disciples never accept his teaching as a whole. Eugenists agree with him so long as he agrees with them; anti-vivisectionists, within their special limitations, call him master; socialists subscribe to certain portions of his programme, but all have more points of difference than of agreement with him.

Irish Protestants frequently profess to find their own country a field too narrow for the exercise of their talents, and in order to escape "provincialism," they seek fame in England. Invariably their fate has been to pass as talented or well-meaning provincials with their English friends and contemporaries. Distinguished Irishmen, on the other hand, whose lives and work have been given to Ireland, are rewarded by being recognised as leaders, when their qualifications justify it. In many instances their reputation has spread abroad, where they finally enjoy the esteem denied to those who began by coveting foreign rather than national distinction. Fortunately, Shaw's has not been the lot of the average West Briton, who prefers being a second-rate Englishman to being a first-rate Irishman. Although he has retained many of the essentials of Irish Protestantism, he has never encouraged that particular trait which produces the pseudo-Englishman. The reason is doubtless that he found it necessary to voice openly the criticism which most loyal Irishmen reserve for private ears. Had he not almost immediately come in contact with the least typical class of Englishman—those who deal in ideas

—he would have found it difficult to be other than discreet in his critical detachment from England.

We have seen so many Irishmen who followed the line of least resistance that we must give credit to Shaw for having delayed his success. That reflection of himself which the average Britisher likes to see in the loyal Irish Protestant has long been the strong card in the play of the expatriate Irishman. Shaw, with the bias of his birth and education, would certainly have been stranded in the shallows of mediocrity, like the majority of his predecessors, if he had sought refuge in the more immediate popularity accorded in England to the provincial Irishman of talent. He was saved by the unorthodoxy of his early London environment. It is unlikely that this would have happened in Dublin, owing to the absence of conditions susceptible of creating social and economic heresies. The heretic in Ireland is more lonely than elsewhere, because of the rigid dogmatism of political life. The only heretical gesture possible is the exchange of creeds. If an Irish Protestant renounces his political faith and goes over to the " enemy," he feels, unless he be a man of exceptional calibre, that he has done a great deal. Shaw could not conceivably take such a step, for even now, as a Home Ruler, he cannot be classed with the faithful.

Nowadays a degree of unorthodoxy has crept into both Unionism and Nationalism which renders them more propitious to adventurous minds. When autonomy enlarge the political outlook, we may expect to see a transvaluation of those values, which will permit the intelligent Irishman to interest himself actively in politics. It is to be regretted that such was not the

case when Shaw was seeking his opportunity, for then Ireland might have profited by all that is excellent in his Protestantism. As it happens, she has been unable to make it subservient to any of her needs, while Shaw himself has not succeeded in adapting it to his own ends. He is too profoundly an Irish Protestant to be wholly intelligible and convincing in England, and for the same reason, he has made no appeal to his native country. In fine, the career of Bernard Shaw, with its strange combination of success and failure, is an illustration of the tragedy and farce of Ireland's relations with England. In normal circumstances he might have been the most powerful force in contemporary Irish life, whereas he is merely the impatiently tolerated satirist of a community in which he is a stranger.

AN IRISH PROTESTANT : BERNARD SHAW.

II.

ABROAD.

THE Protestant mentality had always been, to some extent, incomprehensible to the Catholic mind of the Latin countries. This is not so much a theological as a literary phenomenon, as witness the fundamentally un-Protestant temperament of an Anatole France. There seems to be a subtle relation between the Latin languages and Catholicism, which precludes the possibility of complete success, when the Protestant mind tries to express itself in a linguistic medium to which it is alien. The comparative failure in literature of French Switzerland, contrasted with Belgium, has been ascribed to this cause. If Swiss Protestantism has been unable to find general acceptance, what are the prospects of the Irish variety? Perhaps the most interesting illustration of the effect of quintessential Protestantism upon a Catholic country (in the undogmatic sense) is found in the reception which France has accorded to Bernard Shaw. His early recognition and constant success in Germany are now well-known, and give a special interest to his adventures outside that stronghold of Continental Protestantism.

It was *Candida* which first revealed Mr. Bernard Shaw to an unsuspecting Parisian public. After a

preliminary experiment in Brussels, this play was produced in Paris in 1908. In the Belgian capital M. Hamon had taken the natural precaution of introducing the author to the public by means of a lecture on the Shavian Drama, thus lessening the inevitable shock which *Candida* must have produced on the uninitiated. In France, unfortunately, the only attempt to soften the blow was a short *conférence* on *Candida* itself by Madame Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck. In the circumstances it is not surprising that the success of Brussels was not repeated in Paris. The acting was far from satisfactory, and resulted in giving an atmosphere of sexuality to a play in which the struggle of sex is purely intellectual. Moreover, the whole play was interpreted in a tragic, rather than a comic key, and was, therefore, unintelligible. The traditional trio of the French drama, *le mari, la femme et l'amant* seemed to be present in *Candida,* and no doubt it was for this reason that the play was chosen for a first experiment. But, as M. Cestre has pointed out, this apparent resemblance proved the greatest obstacle to the understanding of Shaw. The familiar premises being granted, the French public was not prepared for the apparently paradoxical conclusions which the author drew from them. M. Faguet expresses this feeling clearly when he says that Shaw is not sincere, that his *dénouements* are too traditional, too moderate in view of the audaciousness of the author's theses. Compared with Ibsen he is wanting in depth, his characters are "all on the surface." "We understand why Nora Helmer leaves her husband and children," says M. Faguet, but few French critics would understand why Candida remained with Morrell. The relations

between her and Marchbanks seemed utterly incomprehensible in Paris. The famous scene, in which Morrell leaves Candida and the poet alone, was a sad disappointment to an audience accustomed to the passionate interludes of the Boulevard drama. At last it looked as if a real "dramatic" moment had arrived, but Shaw, with, as it seemed, deliberate malice, fails to rise to the situation. Marchbanks contents himself with reading verse to Candida until she falls asleep. Naturally the audience was indignant at being deprived of a traditional, if illegitimate, thrill. The poet must have produced an effect somewhat similar to that of Charteris upon M. Filon. "*C'est un homme qui ne fait la cour aux femmes, ni pour le bon ni pour le mauvais motif—comme on l'a dit des Anglais en général, il s'amuse tristement.*" As for Candida, the same critic says she is not a real woman but "the incarnation of a paradox." On the whole the play interested the critics rather than the public. Some of them compared Candida to Nora and Hedda Gabler, to the advantage of Shaw, who was credited with trying to combat the "emancipated heroines" of Ibsen by exalting the traditional domestic woman. He was hailed as "an inferior English Ibsen."

The failure of *Candida* resulted in the lapse of a considerable period before a second attempt was made to acclimatise Shaw in France. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was not produced until February, 1912. Meanwhile M. Hamon, the French prophet of Shavianism, had delivered a course of lectures at the Sorbonne on Bernard Shaw and his work. In this country we are supplied with prefaces so that we may understand the true significance of the author of *Candida*. It was,

therefore, necessary, in the absence of these elucubrations, that some one should prepare the way by a preliminary exposition of the dramatist's point of view. Thus, pending the complete translation of the plays, M. Hamon provided the information necessary for the enlightenment of his countrymen. Finally, when the public had been sufficiently impressed, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was submitted to its newly awakened judgment. This play, of course, arrived in Paris with the inestimable advantage of having been censored; a fact which was sufficient to guarantee the sympathy of the intelligent and to arouse the curiosity of those who were indifferent. It seemed also that the efforts of M. Hamon had not been in vain for, without being enthusiastic, the reception of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was much more favourable than that accorded to *Candida* four years earlier. There was some disposition to take the play seriously, and several critics went so far as to admit that Shaw might possibly be described as "a thinker."

It was inevitable that *Mrs. Warren's Profession* should be compared with *La Maison Tellier* and *Yvette*, owing to the similarity of the problems treated by Shaw and Maupassant. Naturally opinion favoured the French writer, whose treatment of the question was held to be immeasurably superior to that of Bernard Shaw. Vivie Warren was accused of having narrow-minded middle-class prejudices, and her lack of emotion alienated sympathy. In spite of her profession, Mrs. Warren gained the approval of the critics by her natural humanity, as contrasted with the inhuman intellectuality of her daughter. That Yvette should revolt at her mother's life from sentimental,

emotional motives was comprehensible, but nobody could understand or, at all events, sympathise with Vivie, when she leaves her mother, not so much for moral reasons as from a desire to be independent. The aggressive puritanism of Vivie Warren was contrasted unfavourably with the charm and freedom of Yvette, who was none the less pure in the conventional sense. This, of course, detracted somewhat from the success of the piece, which was viewed almost entirely as a presentment of the particular problem which Vivie and Yvette had to face. The wider significance of the play, in fact Shaw's fundamental thesis, was apparently lost in the theatre, for it does not appear in the comments of the critics. M. Henri Bordeaux perhaps had some inkling of the truth for, when he described Shaw's irony as "anti-social," he must have felt all that was subversive of conventional morality in this criticism of existing social and industrial conditions. But he too cannot refrain from crushing Shaw beneath the weight of Maupassant, whose *Maison Tellier* he considers a more effective study of the perverted sense of honour which Mrs. Warren displays. As the chief exponent of banal traditionalism M. Bordeaux could hardly sympathise with Shaw, nor would he dare to speak disparagingly of a writer like Maupassant. Consequently, while he accepts *Maison Tellier,* in which precisely the same point of view is expressed, he accuses Mrs. Warren of "insincerity" when she tries to justify her profession. "One would imagine," he says, "that the author took her seriously." Incomprehension could hardly go further than this. Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of M. Bordeaux's criticism is his justification of his preference for *La*

Maison Tellier on the grounds that if it is "rather ignoble," it was, at least, "amusing." Thus we have the spectacle of a champion of conventionality who objects to a serious discussion of prostitution because it does not amuse him. M. Bordeaux, it seems holds the same view as the English Censor, who tolerates what is respectably indecent and forbids all that is "unpleasantly" serious. At the same time, while he sees the humour of prostitution, he is horrified at the sacrilegious witticisms of Frank Gardner at the expense of his father. But, of course, M. Bordeaux is one of the staunchest supporters of the French family system. Any departure from the attitude of slavish submission upon which that incredible tyranny is based, would seem to him a step in the direction of anarchy. In spite of his evident and natural irritation at seeing his most cherished convictions subjected to criticism, M. Bordeaux hastens to inform Shaw that he should have contented himself with trying to frighten the English middle-classes. It is useless, he pretends, to attempt the same thing in Paris where "people are rather used to dramatic subjects of a daring kind." "The wit of Mr. Bernard Shaw," he concludes, "astonished us here by its seriousness, not by its irony. We are surprised at so laborious a paradox." Yet some years ago M. Filon was so shocked by the "painful" nature of *Mrs Warren's Profession,* that he confessed to some hesitation in summarising it for readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* No doubt during his prolonged residence in England M. Filon had become affected by that English sensitiveness from which M. Bordeaux imagines himself and his countrymen immune.

Only three or four of Bernard Shaw's plays have

been produced in Paris, while the French public is still awaiting the publication of his complete works. In the circumstances it is obvious that his appeal in France must be distinctly limited. At the same time it is hardly possible to form a just estimate of a dramatist whose works have not been published and who has, as a rule, only been studied in the theatre. Literature must be the ultimate test of drama. While it would be too much to assert that Shaw's work is literature—he himself has described it as journalism—it is nevertheless primarily addressed to the reading public. The combination of Fabian pamphlet and philosophic dialogue which Shaw usually sets upon the stage has little dramatic interest, the ideas alone have any value and they can be best appreciated in their printed form. These considerations, however, have had little weight with the majority of French critics, who have no hesitation in pronouncing judgment upon Bernard Shaw, in spite of the fact that his work is, for the most part, inaccessible. *Candida* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* upon which their opinions rest, have not been seen, in their entirety, while even the title of *You Never Can Tell* has been mistranslated.

The elaborate prefaces and discursive stage directions, without which the Shavian drama would apparently be unintelligible, were, of course, not forthcoming at the *Théâtre des Arts.* As may be imagined, the criticism based upon such imperfect knowledge was singularly inept. The quotations which have been given from M. Henri Bordeaux, represent the bulk of what has been written in France on the subject. Shaw's ideas are described as "ancient novelties," calculated, no doubt, to shock English susceptibilities,

but merely tiresome to the enlightened French public, which cannot, we are told, be startled. Apparently this failure to surprise condemns Shaw irrevocably in the eyes of these critics. They never stop to inquire whether he could have any other object in view, having decided beforehand that he could not have any ideas to impart. It would never do to admit that an English play could shock a French audience, the reverse operation being the time-honoured privilege of France. They agreed, therefore, that Shaw must be labelled banal and old-fashioned. Certain critics, however, were undoubtedly shocked by Shaw's immodesty. They complained that he "beat the big drum" in order to draw attention to his genius. This appeal for self-effacement and reserve on the part of those who hailed Rostand with enthusiasm, is not without its humour. On the production of *Chantecler* it was effectively demonstrated that in the art of "log-rolling" and self-advertisement there was nothing that Shaw could teach Paris. It would perhaps be unkind to remind these champions of modesty that their own literature is singularly rich in examples of men who failed to practise the virtue of retirement; Chateaubriand, for example, whose "very skeleton was vain," as Lemaître said, *à propos* of the famous tomb at St. Malo, or Hugo whose ego-mania was proverbial. The recently constituted Hugo Museum is surely one of the most vulgar, offensive advertisements that ever disfigured the memory of a great man. A moment's reflection would have warned these critics of the danger of the proposition that a writer of talent must necessarily cultivate the virtue of humility.

Apart, however, from the criticism obviously in-

spired by a superficial examination of *Candida* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* several eminent critics have turned their attention to the author of those little-understood plays. These studies have been mainly concerned with the dramatist, although occasionally, as in the case of M. Régis Michaud, attempts have been made to include the novels and to sum up the general teaching of Bernard Shaw. M. Michaud's study was clearly the work of an enthusiast writing in the early days before the failure of *Candida* revealed the abyss of misunderstanding which separated Shaw from the French public. Speaking of the absence of emotion in Shaw's work he says that it is "dialectic rather than pathetic, making one think of 'a story of Voltaire or a philosophical drama of Renan.'" He examines at length each of the well-known plays and some of the novels, but his task is one of exposition, he seldom criticises and his comments are usually favourable. Toward the end he ventures upon a prophecy which has yet to be fulfilled. "Translated into our language Shaw would have more than one claim upon us, by all that is social, purely intellectual and even Utopian in his work." M. Filon, on the other hand, is not so sympathetic. "Shaw would be a great dramatist perhaps, if his plays were only—plays," such is the keynote of his criticsim. He, in his turn, proceeds to give a summary of Shaw's plays, but not in the impartial manner of M. Michaud. He waxes virtuously indignant at *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* while *Arms and the Man* is evidently too much for his traditional French love of the *panache.* Even M. Cestre, the most rational and intelligent of Shaw's French critics, prefers not to dwell upon so painful an

exposure of the popular conception of glory. Similarly M. Filon revolts at *The Man of Destiny;* as Yvette Guilbert said, " Shaw's portrait of Napoleon is too true to the original to suit the French." He accuses Shaw of repeating the calumnies of Gillray and of Seeley, in modern times. His explanation of this phenomenon is not devoid of interest. Shaw, it appears, hates Napoleon because, " like Shakespeare, he is still discussed "; he occupies a certain space in history which might otherwise be devoted to George Bernard Shaw. But M. Filon's chief complaint is that while the Shavian drama is rich in characters it is devoid of situations. " His gallery of women is astonishing— They are all real and living except Candida." On this point he is in agreement with M. Michaud who says : " You would think that Shaw had endowed his women with all the feeling he denies to his men." This unanimity of opinion, which is reflected in French criticism generally, contrasts strikingly with the view of English critics, who have invariably objected to the " Shaw woman." It is probably due to the fundamental difference between the treatment of the sex relations in English and French literature. Shaw's view of sex, being more human than the artificial romanticism to which we are accustomed, brings him nearer to the French mind. But this point of contact is exceptional. As a rule the mentality of Shaw is widely separated from that of his French critics. M. Faguet, for instance, who is usually a tolerant and penetrating critic, sees nothing in Shaw's work except " paradox pure and simple." He denies that there is any philosophy underlying this paradoxical form. Shaw cannot be sincere, he argues, because of his violence and ex-

aggeration. He lacks the calm, moderation and profundity which distinguish Ibsen, even when the latter's thesis is most daring. He is " a clown disguised as a preacher," not " a preacher and a mountebank," as he once described himself. Nevertheless M. Faguet compares him to Swift. " In my opinion this man is simply a satirist, but he is the greatest satirist of the present time." He doubts, however, if Shaw will achieve success in France. First, because the French are tired of paradox; nowadays, to be original in France, a writer must " dare " to be simple. Secondly, because his work is essentially Protestant, and difficult to understand outside the country in which it was written. The cant and hypocrisy which Shaw attacks are, of course, common on the other side of the English Channel, but the details of his satire are peculiarly English and involve a knowledge of local conditions. In conclusion, M. Faguet promises him the appreciation of the " *élite* of the French nation," as soon as his works have been properly translated. In France there are ten thousand people capable of enjoying really intellectual literature, and they will not fail to do justice to an author " who has the wit of Swift and Sterne combined." Thus the *amende honorable* of M Faguet.

French criticism has so far supported the contention that the mentality of the Protestant is an obstacle to his being understood by the Latin mind. There is, however, one exception amongst the French critics who have written about Shaw, and he doubtless owes a part of his readier sympathy to the fact of his American experiences. The primitive puritanism of the United States is a useful preparation for the Latin who desires

to understand Shaw. At all events the volume of M. Cestre, *Bernard Shaw et son Œuvre,* is probably one of the finest studies in foreign literature which has appeared in France for many years. The author has those gifts of clearness, lightness and order, and that power of synthesis, which are characteristic of the best French criticism. M. Cestre modestly claims to have merely written an introduction to Shaw for those of his countrymen to whom he is still unfamiliar. Invaluable as his book will be in this respect, it may yet be read with interest by the most ardent Shavians. Into the "chaos of clear ideas" which constitutes the work of Bernard Shaw, M. Cestre has succeeded in introducing order and method, so far as such a thing is possible. In an admirable introductory chapter he sketches Shaw's biography, his early journalistic work, his socialistic propaganda and finally his *début* as a dramatist. Henceforward the bulk of the volume is occupied in a masterly analysis of the Shavian drama, which the author divides under the following headings: Social realism, psychology, love, morality and social philosophy. The spirit in which he approaches the plays, may be judged by the statement with which he begins. "One cannot judge the dramas of Shaw, as one would any other dramatic work of less depth, by simply estimating its descriptive reality and its emotional strength. In order to enjoy and sometimes even to understand them, it is necessary to have stopped to consider the ideas which they contain; the characters and feelings, the action and even the emotion, depend upon the thesis." As the thesis is precisely what French critics have consistently misunderstood or failed to grasp, M. Cestre never fails to bring it out

clearly in the course of his analysis; he sets forth the fundamental ideas with which Shaw approaches life's problems. The reader is enabled to get the Shavian point of view, so that what appears to be "paradox pure and simple" resolves itself into the mere statement of facts viewed from a different standpoint. M. Cestre's attempts to set forth the philosophy of Shaw will be a rude shock to those who had decided in their infinite ignorance that the author of *Candida* was engaged in the familiar pastime of trying to *épater la bourgeoisie*. This prejudice is so deeply rooted that even M. Faguet is only half convinced of the truth of the author's contention that Shaw is a serious critic of social conditions; he accuses M. Cestre of reading more into Shaw than he contains, of "clothing him rather too much as a philosopher." M. Faguet will have to wait for this translation, for which he guarantees an intelligent public; he may change his mind, when he has studied Shaw's works. At all events he will be better able to appreciate the admirable chapter in which M. Cestre discusses the matter, as distinguished from the form of the dramatist. This constitutes what is probably the finest exposition of the Shavian "philosophy" which has yet been given.

Under the title *Le Molière du XX^e Siècle: Bernard Shaw*, M. Augustin Hamon has published the first six lectures which he delivered at the Sorbonne in 1909. On his own showing his qualifications for acting as the interpreter of Shaw in France are (1) that he is a socialist; (2) that he has an imperfect knowledge of English; (3) that he is more familiar with sociology than literature. These idiosyncrasies are painfully evident in the volume in question, which rivals in ineffectiveness

the "authorised version" of Shaw for which we are indebted to Mr. Henderson. M. Hamon has evidently strictly followed Shaw's advice that he should qualify for his task by "going to the circus and watching the methods of the clowns." Filled with a boundless enthusiasm for his subject, devoid alike of a sense of style and a sense of humour, the author shrinks from nothing. Shaw is not merely the profoundest of philosophers, the most trenchant of humorists and the greatest of moralists, but he is also "a dramatist of genius." He is classical, mediæval and modern. He has the style of Voltaire, Renan and Anatole France, the imaginative strength of Rabelais, Rousseau and Beaumarchais, and the artistic touch of Hogarth, Holbein and Gainsborough. M. Hamon is never at a loss for a comparison or a superlative. His judgments in literature are disconcerting and confirm his own statement that he has hitherto left the subject severely alone. In order to prove that Shaw is a great classical dramatist he embarks upon a history of the theatre, manufactures a definition of drama which will suit his own conclusions, and then proceeds to interpret dramatic literature in the light of his theories. Thus he has been able to make the discovery which is his sole original contribution to the criticism of Shaw, namely that the latter is "the Molière of the twentieth century." He was the first to identify systematically the work of the two writers, although both M. Filon and Mr. Henderson had already compared Shaw and Molière.

Having incorrectly attributed to Aristotle the law of the three unities, M. Hamon formulates the golden rule of drama, which is that it should "please." He then

proves that Shaw pleases, therefore we must conclude he is a genius. Why he should not have called him "the Aristophanes of the twentieth century" is not quite clear, for he states that the absence of acts and scenes in the Shavian drama is renewed from the Greeks. However, let us see why he compares him with Molière. They are identical in the absence or unreality of plot and action, they invented the play with a central figure, they mix comedy and tragedy and they are both moralists, the philosophers of common sense. Like Molière, Shaw takes the part of youth against old age, he is no respecter of persons or institutions, his servants play important parts and parody their masters, he is an optimist and his morality consists in obeying the laws of nature. These are the superficial resemblances upon which M. Hamon bases his belief that Bernard Shaw is the Molière of the present time. With a similar lack of any sense of proportion, and the same data, it would be possible to prove that Shaw was a tragic dramatist like Æschylus, or that his plays were identical with the farces and moralities of the mediæval theatre. In fact at one moment M. Hamon apparently wrestles with this temptation, but finally contents himself with the statement that the women in Shaw, like those of the *chansons de geste,* are the pursuers and captors of men. M.Hamon should re-read Molière and try to understand why *L'Avare* and *Tartuffe* still live. He may then ask himself whether *Candida* or *The Man of Destiny* will be appreciated after the lapse of three hundred years. When he has convinced the world of this we shall be prepared to regard Shaw as "the Molière of the twentieth century," but not until then. As yet he has

merely confirmed the popular French notion that Protestantism is incompatible with a sense of humour. He has all the laborious seriousness which is considered typically "Swiss."

It would be hazardous to prophesy the success of Bernard Shaw in France. As has been shown, criticism oscillates between the unqualified hostility of the ignorant and the equally indiscriminating idolatry of M. Hamon, whom he has chosen to translate his works into French. It seems that in so doing he has deliberately decided to lessen, if not wholly to destroy, his chances of appealing to the French public. M. Hamon admits himself that he has no qualifications for the work, beyond his admiration for Shaw's ideas. Thus the task of translation, always a delicate and difficult one, has been entrusted to inefficient hands, as witness the title of *You Never Can Tell,* so inadequately, if not incorrectly, rendered by "*On ne peut jamais dire.*" Shaw once said that he himself was the greatest obstacle to his success. In France he will be seconded in this work of obstruction by his translator, to whom he is attached, as M. Robert d'Humières has said, "like a criminal to the rope which hanged him." The same critic described this as "a defiant and heroic act," being nothing short of "suicide on the threshold of our admiration." It is a pity, for France has many things to learn which Shaw could teach her, even though he be, in the words of M. Filon, "an iconoclast who has, so far, only broken cheap plaster casts of our immortal gods." A people notoriously conservative and unusually critical of literary form would naturally have had some difficulty in accepting Shaw's work. Defective translation will not

help to simplify the process of assimilation. M. Hamon, however, may console himself and his victim with the *tu l'as voulu Georges Dandin* of the author whose name he does not scruple to take in vain.

It would be a mistake, meanwhile, to insist unduly upon the responsibility whose greatness was thrust upon the translator by the author himself. The efforts of Herr Trebitsch are scarcely more adequate to the original, yet German criticism has shown sympathy, if not always agreement, with Bernard Shaw. His career in France must be regarded, therefore, as another instance of the failure of the voice of Protestantism to penetrate the ears of Latin Europe.

A LONELY IRISHMAN:
EDWARD DOWDEN

A LONELY IRISHMAN: EDWARD DOWDEN.

HE wide esteem enjoyed by Edward Dowden during his lifetime, as a Shakespearian scholar and critic, renders it unnecessary, now that he is dead, to enlarge upon that side of his literary activities. In 1913, when he died, tributes came from every part of the world testifying to the universal recognition of the value of a life, that had been devoted to letters. His position has been so long established that it would be incongruous were a short essay in posthumous criticism to concern itself with an examination of the wider aspects of his genius. It may, however, be permitted to add, as it were a footnote, in which an attempt is made to consider Edward Dowden as an Irishman of letters, to review his relations with his Irish contemporaries, and to estimate his influence upon the literature of his own country.

Edward Dowden was born in Cork on May 3rd, 1843, and he died on April 3rd, 1913, in Dublin, where he had lived and worked all his life. He was, therefore, a witness, not only of the Irish Literary Revival, as it is popularly understood, but also of the earliest stirring of the new spirit which heralded the renascence of Irish literature. Samuel Ferguson, the authentic precursor of the Revival, was a friend and companion of Dowden's, so too were Aubrey de Vere and John Todhunter, both of whom were caught by the "Celtic wave," and contributed their part towards the new

literature which was to be the expression of Irish Nationality in the English tongue. One of his oldest and closest friends was J. B. Yeats, the artist, whose son has played so prominent a part in the Revival as to become almost synonymous with it in their minds of many people. In short, all the older and many of the younger writers, have at some time or other been in contact, to a varying degree, with Edward Dowden. What was the fruit of this relationship?

When Dowden was appointed Professor of English Literature at Dublin University in 1867 the Celtic revival was just beginning to crystallise. The work of men like George Sigerson, whose *Poets and Poetry of Munster* was published in 1860, and of Samuel Ferguson, who had recently brought out his *Lays of the Western Gael,* announced the awakening of a new spirit in Anglo-Irish literature. Ferguson, in particular, showed in the volume mentioned, as in its successor *Congal,* that the contact of sympathy and knowledge with the legendary stories of Ireland could produce poetry that was national without been merely political. Unlike the rhetorical poets of *The Nation,* Ferguson brought a wide acquaintance with Irish antiquity to the expression of a deep sense of nationality. His ambition was to lay the foundation of a national literature in the English language, and to this task he devoted all the culture and scholarship which were, at that time, usually consecrated to the work of denationalisation. It was deemed a species of intellectual aberration, this impulse which drove Ferguson to the very roots of Celtic civilisation, and which undoubtedly deprived him of immediate and popular success.

Most of Ferguson's work appeared during the first decade of Dowden's professorship, and those were the years which saw the publication of the latter's most important contributions to critical and purely creative literature. Ferguson's great epic *Congal* preceded Dowden's *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art,* by two years, having been published in 1872, while his volume of *Poems* in 1880 followed those of Dowden by only four years. Anything more dissimilar than the literary activities of these two friends during the same period it would be difficult to imagine. While the one was uniquely preoccupied with the literature of England, the other worked alone in the almost unexplored domain of Irish letters. The legends and stories which were threatened with oblivion, having become the prey of antiquarians, were saved from obscurity by the imagination and devoted learning of Ferguson. In his pages Deirdre and Cuchulain lived again, the tragedy of the Red Branch of Ulster was restored to the dignity of poetry.

Dowden knew of the efforts Ferguson was making, both in prose and verse, to recover for Ireland her literary heritage. He had received from his friend both *Congal* and the *Poems,* he had read in the *Dublin University Review* those *Hibernian Nigths' Entertainments,* in which Ferguson essayed in prose, stories to supplement the work of his verse. Yet he does not seem ever to have sensed the significance of these efforts. *Congal* he admired in a detached way, admitting that he could "never more than half enter into it." Instead of exercising the influence which he already enjoyed as a critic, to second Ferguson, he merely notes the fact that by seeking his subjects in

Irish history the poet necessarily limited his audience. Apparently Dowden did not see the vicious circle in which such reasoning must confine Irish poetry. Obviously if no critic would help to spread the fame of Irish legend, the literature concerned therewith would necessarily fail to make a wide appeal. If he had adopted the same attitude towards foreigners some of his most valuable achievements would have been lost. But Dowden was no "hidebound pedant," his limitations were not noticeably academic. During these years of preparation for the Revival, precisely when his eyes should have been fixed upon what was happening beneath them, they were turned away to the other end of the earth. Whitman found in him an early admirer, and it is eternally to Dowden's credit that he worked so energetically on behalf of a poet who had little to recommend him to the professional mind, as witness the comments still current in American university criticism of the author of *Leaves of Grass*.

It is interesting to contrast Dowden's attitude towards Whitman with that which he invariably adopted where Irish poetry was concerned. He is zealous for the American poet's success, has a jealous eye for any critic who appears hostile or lukewarm, and his endeavour is constantly to make a plea for Whitman wherever his article will be published. Thus, for example, he reproached James Russell Lowell with neglect of Whitman, and referring to an article on Lowell he writes: "I thought it more and more wholesome to reduce his stature, as far as I had it in my power, to its actual height." This admiration and enthusiasm of Dowden's for Whitman actually became

a bond between J. B. Yeats, Standish O'Grady and himself. All three wrote or worked on behalf of Whitman, yet the link of nationality could not bind them, for at that point their ways diverged.

In view of the subsequent position of O'Grady, as the father of the Literary Revival in Ireland, it is strange to note how blind Dowden was in his case, as in Ferguson's. O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (1878-1880) was the starting point of a new literature, yet it was not that wonderful epic which attracted Dowden to him, but their common interest in Walt Whitman. One can imagine what Dowden could have thought of a French critic who knew Baudelaire, but was drawn to him only by their mutual admiration for Edgar Allan Poe. Relatively the two cases are analogous. Whatever may be said of his failure to realise the importance of Ferguson, Dowden's inability to see in O'Grady anything more than a fellow enthusiast for Whitman indicated a serious defect of critical perception. That he should not admire O'Grady's flamboyant, turbulent style, the reflection of an extraordinary brilliant imagination, was admissible. The epic historian of Cuchulain had faults which not even his admirers deny, but he had qualities which a sensitive critic should have discerned. The nobility of the bardic imagination lit up the page of those histories and romances, so that they at once fired the minds of the young poets who have now become synonymous with the literary renascence in Ireland.

The exact depth of the abyss which separated Dowden from the literary movement of his own country can best be gauged by his criticism of the first material from which the new literature has sprung. When

Aubrey de Vere confesses to a desire to treat of some legend of the Heroic Age, Dowden endeavours to dissuade him. "Do not let so great a subject as Thomas à Becket slip for the sake of any Irish Heroic subject," he writes. A comparison of what such a theme as Deirdre has proved to be at the hands of W. B. Yeats or J. M. Synge with the colourless elaboration of English history by de Vere and his school, is sufficient to demonstrate how erroneous were Dowden's views. As it was, he had later to admit to de Vere that the latter's *Foray of Queen Maeve* compelled his interest, in spite of his coming to it "neither as an Englishman nor as an Irishman, but as a half-breed." There is no letter in the three volumes of Dowden's correspondence which throws light upon the curious mentality of the half-breed Irishman than this letter to de Vere. That exasperating complacency of the "West Briton": "I am infinitely glad that I spent my early enthusiasm on Wordsworth and Spenser and Shakespere, and not on anything Ireland ever produced." Then the admission that the Irish legends and history are not at all despicable. Deirdre is "one of the greatest tragic stories of the world—one of those which, like some subjects of Greek Tragedy, may be handled again and again by different poets." Yet, at the end, a note of jocosity,—not in itself reprehensible perhaps,—but which one feels would have been absent from a similar criticism of an English subject. The almost instinctive desire to belittle—not to take too seriously, at all events—the "mere Irish" element, which the Anglicised Irishman resists even more rarely than the Englishman.

As time went on, the new generation began to write

out of the enthusiasm engendered by O'Grady's revelations of Irish history and mythology, and the eighteen nineties brought forth the first fruits of the Irish Literary Revival. Just as he had failed to sympathise with Ferguson and O'Grady, so Dowden withheld all encouragement from their successors. His old friend Todhunter could not resist the movement, but contributed to *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* whose appearance in 1888 marked the first conscious, concerted manifestation of the new spirit, and in the same year published *The Banshee and other Poems,* with a dedicatory acknowdegment of inspiriation to Standish O'Grady. In 1889 W. B. Yeats's *Wanderings of Oisin* consecrated the birth of a new literature by obtaining for the Revival the recognition of foreign critics.

During all this time Dowden was silent, and though challenged in the Press and on the platform by Yeats, he still refused to admit the claims of a national Anglo-Irish literature. Neither the example of his own friends, nor the appeals of the rising generation moved him. The National Literary Societies were founded in London and Dublin and numbered amongst their most enthusiastic members contemporaries and pupils of Dowden, but he himself remained aloof. His only semi-public utterance directly concerned with the national literary movement was in 1879, when he declined to participate in the celebration of Thomas Moore's centenary. Although Dowden could become enthusiastic over the obscurest Elizabethan English poet, and even asserted the claims of Mrs. Hemans, Thomas Moore could not secure his indulgence. That Moore was not "in the highest sense of the word,

great," as Dowden argued, nobody denied. His comparative unimportance from the English point of view could not, however, concern Ireland, where it was felt that precisely this fact emphasised the necessity for cherishing his memory.

Irish writers who have developed, in spite of the difficulties imposed upon national culture, lose nothing of their stature, even though the attempt he made to dwarf them by comparison with the great names of English literature. In fact their merits are merely exaggerated when such critics as Dowden, ignoring the relativity of all values, insist upon setting up standards which are wholly inapplicable. The fact that Moore does not come up to the level of a Wordsworth or a Shelley by no means diminishes his claim to consideration. It was the centenary of an Irish, not of an *English,* poet that was celebrated, an interesting fact which Dowden did not appreciate. Yet he would never have disputed the right of the Provençaux to do homage to Mistral although academic criticism might easily demonstrate that the author of *Miréio* was of less importance than Cervantes, Ronsard or Dante. In spite of Dowden's reproof, the centenary was observed, and nowadays, when the value of regionalism has been proved, the number of those who can sympathise with his attitude has measurably decreased.

When the Irish Literary Theatre was founded various people interested in artistic experiment came forward as guarantors, should the enterprise fail. Although these names included many who could not, by any stretch of imagination, be regarded as narrow partisans of Irish nationality, Dowden, nevertheless, does not figure amongst them. Here again he failed to

support at home what would certainly receive encouragement from him abroad. The absence of any suggestion of Nationalist propaganda, as proved by the presence on the list of guarantors of all classes and creeds—not excepting Trinity College—would seem to have afforded him an opportunity to associate himself with the dramatic movement, yet he did not avail himself of it. Interested though he was in Ibsen, of whom he wrote with a deep sense of appreciation, Dowden could not extend his sympathy to a movement which, in its origin at least, owed much to the example and inspiration of the Norwegian dramatist. Yet about this time there were signs that Dowden was beginning to realise the strength of the literature which he had done nothing to foster, and whose impulse he had not recognised or had misunderstood.

The subtle essayist "John Eglinton," whose *Two Essays on the Remnant* appeared in 1895, at once attracted him, and he is the only writer of the Revival of whom Dowden regretted not having written a study. A year or so later we find him expressing enthusiasm for "Æ." He writes to "John Eglinton": "I have got great satisfaction out of 'Æ.'s' volume . . . . There are few poems . . . from which I have not got a good reward. I have crept through them like a dew-fed creature, silent and enraptured." Passages like these indicate a modification of that earlier indifference to everything produced in Ireland under the ægis of a culture independent of England. Unfortunately Dowden never testified publicly to this change of heart. The National Theatre, born shortly after these lines were written, struggled and grew without the assistance, moral or material, of Dowden, who did not seem

to realise its significance until the worst difficulties had been vanquished. When the controversy raged on the occasion of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World,* Dowden was on the side of liberty, but in private. With curious inconsistency he regretted that literary polemics, and the practical problems of the theatre were taking W. B. Yeats from his work as a poet. How much more valuable this concern for Yeats could have been in the early days when the poet was struggling for recognition,—for an ideal,—both since achieved. Probably the severest reflection upon Dowden's ability as a critic was his failure to realise the genius of W. B. Yeats. He had unique opportunities of becoming intimate with and aiding the son of his old friend, but it was not until it was too late that he saw how blind he had been.

It has been urged, in explanation of Dowden's attitude towards the literature of his own country, that his conception of culture was too wide to permit him to diverge into the narrower path of regionalism, or as he and his apologists called it, "provincialism." When about to be included in *A Treasury of Irish Poetry,* he said: "What I have written has really no right to appear in a specially Irish Anthology, and if anything worth living in it, it comes out of the general mother, Earth; so I should be content to be one of a general crowd of small singers rather than one of a local group." This interesting confession was, without a doubt, sincere, and appears to support the theory advanced in extenuation of Dowden's indifference to the work of the Literary Revival in Ireland. Its plausibility must not, however, blind us to the essential weakness of this point of view. In the first place,

similar reasoning might have been, and doubtless was, employed against Dante, when he discarded the Latin of "universal" culture, and addressed himself to the "local group" who understood Italian, "provincials" relatively to the wider public which could be reached by Latin. All national literatures must at one time submit to being patronised, as "local" and "narrow," by those in favour of the established linguistic and literary conventions. Cultivated critics must have shuddered when they were asked to lay aside their Virgils or Ovids for a moment and listen to the crude provincialisms of the *Chanson de Roland!*

Were it demonstrable that Dowden never swerved from the contemplation of only the greatest minds in literature, then his neglect of Ferguson, O'Grady, Yeats and the others would be comprehensible. But, on the contrary, the breadth and diversity of his reading, his faculty for exploring the bypaths were so well known as to constitute an important part of his valuable contribution to English criticism. From these excursions into the lesser known regions of literature he invariably returned with some treasure. There is something disconcerting to the Irish mind in this readiness to welcome the "discovery" of a Traherne, this eager interest in the least important productions of old and contemporary English poets, side by side with a most critically reserved attitude towards the work of men nearer home. It is difficult to accept as evidence of universality of critical outlook, Dowden's enthusiasm for Aubrey de Vere's treatment of heroic legend compared with his silence where Yeats's *Wandrings of Oisin* was concerned. It is doubtless permissible to admire Longfellow and to see the merit of

Mrs. Hemans, but these weaknesses are suspicious in one whose vision of literature was too lofty to allow *The Wind Among the Reeds* to come within its range. Nor is one's equanimity restored on learning that Dowden preferred musical comedy to *The Playboy*. After seeing the latter, he writes: "I'd have liked the little Jap girls and the songs better than Pegeen and Christy."

On every hand we have evidence that Edward Dowden was not a narrow critic, in the general sense of the term. He was free from many of the prejudices most current in the circle in which he moved. His championship of Whitman indicated how slight was his preoccupation with the conventions, moral and literary, of his class. As is well known, when he presented a copy of *Leaves of Grass* to Trinity College, the book was returned to him, having been condemned as unworthy of a place upon the academic shelves of the University Library. Similarly, Matthew Arnold was disturbed by Dowden's acceptance of the "irregularity" of Shelley's life. The note of moral indignation was absent from all Dowden's criticisms of literature. He did not allow himself to be possessed by the desire to censure conduct merely because the latter did not coincide with the accepted formulæ of the time. "John Eglinton" has remarked that "for many years Dowden's mind was probably the first point touched by anything new in the world of ideas outside Ireland." He was, in a sense, the receiver which caught the sound waves of literature and transmitted the message to such of his countrymen as cared to listen. The level of eminence such a position implies could only have been reached by one not labouring under the

burden of too many conventional impedimenta. It is precisely this circumstance which emphasises the incongruity of the great critic's blindness where Irish literature was concerned, and constitutes the significance of his case.

The explanation of Edward Dowden's relation to the Literary Revival will be found in the fact that he was, as he jestingly called himself, "a half-breed" Irishman. Superior as he showed himself to environment, he was, in one important particular, absolutely typical of the anglicised education he received, and in his turn, imparted. While his breadth of culture might have prevented him from exaggerating the value of many Irish writers, it should not have precluded all recognition of their importance. Those who have used this plea of universality to justify Dowden's neglect of what was local, reason as though an understanding of Yeats were necessarily incompatible with an appreciation of the masters of the world's literature. We are to believe that this was the dilemma in which Dowden found himself. He had either to read Shakespere or Synge, and naturally his choice was the former. It is as if one argued with an Alpinist that the ascent of the Matterhorn must debar him from ever enjoying the more modest pleasures of the Northumbrian or Welsh hills.

A sense of values would have saved Dowden from such manifestations as that which marked his refusal to participate in the Moore Centenary. It was he, not those he would have rebuked, who was guilty of exaggeration, when he saw in the celebration of the first Anglo-Irish poet of distinction a challenge to the

great poets of England. But there is room for the suspicion, that Dowden preferred to incur this reproach, rather than reveal himself frankly. His real motive, it may be assumed, was political, he feared he might be associated with men and ideas that did not fit into his political creed. He sacrificed his reputation as a critic in order to save his name as a politician. Birth, training and subsequent career all helped to harden the political mould of Dowden's mind. With a predisposition in favour of England he found everything conspiring to keep him in the direction towards which his teachers had turned his face. Needless to say that was away from Ireland. What education had not done was completed by the destiny which made him professor of English literature in Dublin University at the unripe age of twenty-four. There it was almost a moral impossibility to expand laterally. He could progress onwards and upwards, but on either side of his straight path were expanses of unknown territory which he dared not explore. His mental suppleness must inevitably have been impaired by the examination machine, which has always demanded absolute surrender as a condition of success. Reaction was only possible within the limits marked by the deep incisions of the instrument to which he subjected his mind. Phenomenal success in this receptive period was followed by equally remarkable results when Dowden began to deepen the furrows which had been cut for him. The fame which *Shakespere: His Mind and Art* brought, after eight years' professorship, must have seemed a consecration, as it was a justification, of all that Dowden had submitted to, in the years of preparation. Clearly this was no meagre

triumph for a system which, but for these occasional surprises, would be intolerable.

The son of Irish Protestants, educated at Trinity College, holding the chair of English Literature, and with an already established reputation as a critic in his own branch, Edward Dowden was hardly situated so as to acquire a sympathetic insight into Irish affairs. At that time, particularly, when national and Nationalist were synonymous terms, there was but little chance of his effecting the dissociation of ideas which now enables the Unionist to view national literature with equanimity, or even with interest. The conditions of Dowden's life up to the time when he might have helped the Literary movement in Ireland were such as to make it impossible for him to do so. Ferguson, with similar traditions and the same educational opportunities, was saved by his antiquarian interest in Celtic Ireland. But this was a key which Dowden did not possess, so one door remained closed to him for ever. "Irish" Ireland was known to him only as a strange country where poverty, moonlighting, rebellion and ignorance survived. As he confesses, Cuchulain and Deirdre were not even names to him, the Heroic Age did not exist for him, and when he eventually heard of it, he was simply rebuffed by the spectacle of a new mythology, whose personages slipped from his grasp into the obscurities of an unpronounceable nomenclature! As for the Irish language, his masters had pronounced upon it, and had decided it was the speech of barbarians and should be left to such.

His ambition was to be known as a poet, and that little volume of *Poems* in 1876 meant more to Dow-

den than all the books which have spread his name throughout the reading world. These are the poems, which he so ardently wished to preserve from the stigma of provincialism. On that account he did not care to see them included in *A Treasury of Irish Poetry*. "The direction of such work as I have done in literature has been (to give it a grand name) Imperial or cosmopolitan," he wrote, "and though I think a literature ought to be rooted in the soil, I don't think a conscious effort to promote a provincial spirit tends in that direction." It is difficult to conceive such a definition of literary purpose producing great poetry, and Dowden's verse, for all its occasional charm, is no proof of the contrary. It is cold and colourless, as a rule, for what else can "cosmopolitan" poetry be? In fact, by an irony of fate, of all that he wrote, his poetical work alone is provincial. It has no roots in the poet's native soil, it simply follows the English tradition, and remains, in the end, the poetry of a provincial, treading at a respectful distance in the wake of his superiors. Mangan, Ferguson, "Æ.," and Yeats, who were not afraid lest the Irish spirit breathe through their work, who allowed the landscape of Ireland to colour their verse, have attained success by the very means which Dowden despised. They preferred to risk failure as Irishmen, rather than bid for safety as provincial Englishmen. The statement that Edward Dowden was a "lonely" figure, has an air of paradox. A critic whose fame had spread at an early date over the world of scholarship and letters, and whose interests ranged from the Elizabethans to Ibsen, would seem to be immune from any suggestion of provincialism.

Dowden had no difficulty in bridging the space which separated Weimar from Camden, New Jersey; Goethe and Whitman were equally dreamt of in his literary philosophy, yet it was his fate to be all his life a provincial, and there we have an explanation of the loneliness which was his lot. Cut off from the stream of Irish culture by political and social prejudices, he could not participate in the intellectual life of his country. The very nature of his success served only to lead him further and further away from Ireland, in the direction of that cosmopolitanism, which he tried—obviously without convincing himself—to dignify as "Imperialism." Consequently, Edward Dowden was intellectually isolated by continuous residence upon a soil to which he was neither mentally nor spiritually rooted. The voluminousness of his correspondence, as evidenced by the three volumes of selected letters published since his death, was probably due to loneliness. Unable to share the interests of literary Ireland, he was obliged to find in correspondence the human relationship which he craved. Himself a rare exception to the literary sterility of Anglicised Ireland, he had no hope of finding his equal in the *milieu* of which he was a product. Had he lived in England he would have enjoyed to the full the position to which he was entitled. His predecessors and contemporaries, Swift, Sheridan, Wilde, and Shaw, frankly sought the public to which they addressed themselves; Dowden remained *in* Ireland, but not *of* it.

Thus it came about that Dowden was a provincial. In Ireland he was not an Irishman, in any national sense, and in England he was not altogether an Eng-

lishman. As a young man he wrote: "Each time I come to England it seems newer and more foreign. I think on the whole I am glad to be Anglo-Irish rather than English," and the rest of this letter is simply an expression of the normal Irishman's sense of aloofness, of being a stranger, when confronted by essentially English conditions. Contrasting the appearance of the two peoples, he continues: "I should say you have to go a good deal higher up in the social scale in England to get real humanity—a good deal higher than in Ireland." Ten years later, in 1884, we find the same spirit peeping through a letter in which he says: "In connection with Shelley's visit to Ireland, I had to read a good deal of Irish history, and now know more about Grattan, Curran, Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Napper Tandy, and other heroes. I have found it a most fascinating piece of history, and I thank my stars that I have been born out of due season—for as sure as that I sit here—a literary Epicurean, I should have been by Wolfe Tone's side in those days." What is this, after all, but a revelation of the true mentality of every Irishman? For are we not all, at heart, irreconcilable? The anti-national instinct is, after all, but an acquired characteristic, reversion to type is always possible.

In fine, Dowden's was that false position to which so many Irishmen are condemned, owing to the peculiar constitution of Irish society. The process of denationalisation has failed, but there has long been a minority clinging tenaciously to the illusion of anglicisation. Nowadays nationalism has taken on an easier manner, and there is an increasing tendency to dissociate a sense of Irish nationality from those hor-

rors with which Dowden, as a Protestant Unionist, identified it. This mellowing influence, which allows many to admire what older generations despised and misunderstood, is due, in some measure, to the work of the Literary Revival. Since the birth of an Anglo-Irish literature national in spirit, the conception of Irish nationality has widened. The aggressive, anti-English note disappeared when W. B. Yeats and his friends succeeded in overthrowing the supremacy of the *Spirit of the Nation* school of poetry, and in substituting artistic and cultural for political values. They raised the literary level to a plane upon which even the hypercritical could breathe, while the revelation of Celtic legend, and the reaffirmation of tradition defied the accusation of provincialism.

Towards the end of his life, Dowden submitted noticeably to the softening of time. In contrast with his early anxiety lest Aubrey de Vere should forsake Thomas à Beckett for a theme from the Heroic Age, we find him speaking enthusiastically of Synge's " magnificent *Deirdre,*" which puts him in the first rank of tragic poets. Similarly, he displayed a keener interest, when names such as Padraic Colum, Seumas O'Sullivan, and James Stephens were brought to his notice. When he read Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* his attitude towards heroic subjects had so altered that the manner, and not the matter, drew forth criticism, Dowden found himself in agreement with George Moore, in his inability to appreciate the Kiltartan speech. This tardy recognittion of what he had missed, however, only emphasised the loss resulting from his long alienation from Irish interests.

There was not only the thought of all he might have done to develop and guide young talent in need of such a master; but also, the feeling that his example and influence had deprived Ireland of some promising writers. Since Dowden would not, or could not, at first, understand the necessity for approaching Anglo-Irish literature from a national standpoint, the effect of his criticism, however kindly, must have been negative. No young Irish poet could become articulate, who had accepted the theory that all things must be measured by the greatest English standards. Unless he were strong enough to assert his right to be compared with those of his own race and tradition, he would inevitably renounce all claim to be heard.

That a critic of international fame should consecrate himself to literature, and yet remain outside the movement which has profoundly affected the intellectual life of his own country, must be counted among the saddest of those absurdities, which have so long been characteristic of Ireland. It is impossible to exaggerate the evils resulting from the unnatural conditions to which our political situation has condemned us. The case of Edward Dowden has the significance of a symbol, for he was typical of the cleavage which has made of us two nations, only now in the process of discovering one another. In his own life he paid the penalty of the intellectual expatriate, in that his friends were, for the most part, separated from him by all that makes England so very different from Ireland. Refusing to cultivate such opportunities as Ireland offered, for fear of provincialism, he saw himself condemned always to figure as a provincial, buried away out of sight of the world, in which his literary

activities had made him famous. Had he not been the victim of social and political considerations, he might have been a co-worker of the literary renascence, instead of remaining alone, the only Irishman of distinction that his class has given to the world of contemporary literature. While those who followed national traditions and ideals found companions and the joy of fellowship in creating an intellectual movement, whose impulse is still strong, Dowden was necessarily isolated. His were the surroundings which may foster scholarship, or develop a genius for practical affairs, but they cannot produce literature. Literature is national, and those who, like Dowden, made cosmopolitanism their aim, have remained irretrievably in the provincial ranks of the imitators. Had Dowden been able to devote all his time to poetry, it is doubtful if he could have progressed any further in the direction revealed by his volume of 1876. There the limit of progress was marked by something more fundamental than stress of professional work to which he ascribed the check upon his poetic talent.

This alienation which made Dowden a stranger in the domain of Irish achievement, was the cause of twofold loss. The man himself was the loser in his imaginative and in his social life, while Anglo-Irish literature was the poorer of a great critic. "John Eglinton" has suggested that Dowden's contribution to Irish literature "was perhaps the greatest he could have made, a personality." It could, with more justice be said that such *might* have been his contribution, had he cared to make it. But owing to the unique circumstances already referred to, he was cut

off almost entirely from the intellectual growth of his country. Here were a fine mind, a devotion to literature, which indeed constituted him "a saint of culture," and a literary personality of extraordinary power and charm, yet, so far as Ireland was concerned, they did not exist. In any other country Edward Dowden would have been the centre of a creative group, for none was so ready to welcome talent, to encourage the beginner and to foster the spirit of literature. But the Literary Revival was prepared and flourished without a word of help or welcome from the one man who should have been the Master. He could have supplied precisely the element that was lacking, creative criticism. A sense of this need is his only legacy to our national literature.